THE MADRAS HOUSE

A COMEDY, IN FOUR ACTS,

BY GRANVILLE BARKER

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The Madras House

A COMEDY

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THE MADRAS HOUSE

ACT I

The HUXTABLES *live at Denmark Hill, for* MR. HUXTABLE *is the surviving partner in the well-known Peckham drapery establishment of Roberts & Huxtable, and the situation, besides being salubrious, is therefore convenient. It is a new house.* MR. HUXTABLE *bought it half finished, so that the interior might be to his liking; its exterior the builder said one might describe as of a Free Queen Anne Treatment; to which* MR. HUXTABLE *rejoined, after blinking at the red brick spotted with stone ornament, that After all it was inside they were going to live, you know.*

Through the stained, grained front door, rattling with coloured glass, one reaches the hall, needlessly narrow, needlessly dark, but with its black and white tessellated pavement making for cleanliness. On the left is the stained and grained staircase, with its Brussels carpet and twisted brass stair rods, on the right the drawing-room. The drawing-room can hardly be said to express the personality of MR. HUXTABLE. *The foundations of its furnishings are in the taste of* MRS. HUXTABLE. *For fifteen years or so additions to this family museum have been disputed into their place by the six* MISS HUXTABLES: LAURA *(aged thirty-nine),* MINNIE, CLARA, JULIA, EMMA, JANE *(aged twenty-six). The rosewood cabinets,*

the picture from some Academy of the early Seventies, entitled In Ye Olden Time (this was a wedding present, most likely), the gilt clock, which is a Shakespeare, narrow-headed, but with a masterly pair of legs, propped pensively against a dial and enshrined beneath a dome of glass, another wedding present. These were the treasures of MRS. HUXTABLE'S *first drawing-room, her solace in the dull post-honeymoon days. She was the daughter of a city merchant, wholesale as against her husband's retail; but even in the Seventies retail was lifting its head. It was considered, though, that* KATHERINE TOMBS *conferred some distinction upon young* HARRY HUXTABLE *by marrying him, and even now, as a portly lady nearing sixty, she figures by the rustle of her dress, the measure of her mellow voice, with its carefully chosen phrases, for the dignity of the household.*

The difference between one MISS HUXTABLE *and another is, to a casual eye, the difference between one lead pencil and another, as these lie upon one's table, after some weeks' use; a matter of length, of sharpening, of wear.* LAURA'S *distinction lies in her being the housekeeper; it is a solid power, that of ordering the dinner. She is very silent. While her sisters are silent with strangers, she is silent with her sisters. She doesn't seem to read much, either; one hopes she dreams, if only of wild adventures with a new carpet-sweeper. When there was some family bitterness as to whether the fireplace, in summer, should hold ferns or a Chinese umbrella, it was* LAURA'S *opinion that an umbrella gathers less dust, which carried the day.* MINNIE *and* CLARA *are inclined to religion; not sentimentally; works are a good second with them to faith. They have veered,*

though, lately, from district visiting to an interest in Missions—missions to Poplar or China (one is almost as far as the other); good works, the results of which they cannot see. Happily, they forbear to ask why this proves the more soul-satisfying sort.

JULIA *started life—that is to say, left school—as a genius. The head mistress had had two or three years of such dull girls that really she could not resist this excitement. Watercolour sketches were the medium. So* JULIA *was dressed in brown velveteen, and sent to an art school, where they wouldn't let her do watercolour drawing at all. And in two years she learnt enough about the trade of an artist not ever to want to do those watercolour drawings again.* JULIA *is now over thirty, and very unhappy. Three of her watercolours (early masterpieces) hang on the drawing-room wall. They shame her, but her mother won't have them taken down. On a holiday she'll be off now and then for a solitary day's sketching, and as she tears up the vain attempt to put on paper the things she has learnt to see, she sometimes cries. It was* JULIA, EMMA *and* JANE *who, some years ago, conspired to present their mother with that intensely conspicuous cosy corner. A cosy corner is apparently a device for making a corner just what the very nature of a corner should forbid it to be. They beggared themselves; but one wishes that* MR. HUXTABLE *were more lavish with his dress allowances, then they might at least have afforded something not quite so hideous.*

EMMA, *having* JULIA *in mind, has run rather to coats and skirts and common sense. She would have been a success in an office, and worth, perhaps, thirty shillings a week. But the* HUXTABLES *don't want an-*

other thirty shillings a week, and this gift, such as it is, has been wasted, so that EMMA *runs also to a brusque temper.*

JANE *is meekly enough a little wild.* MRS. HUXTABLE'S *power of applying the brake of good breeding, strong enough over five daughters, waned at the sixth attempt in twelve years, and* JANE *has actually got herself proposed to twice by not quite desirable young men. Now the fact that she was old enough to be proposed to at all came as something of a shock to the family. Birthdays pass, their celebration growing less emphatic. No one likes to believe that the years are passing; even the birthday's owner, least able to escape its significance, laughs, and then changes the subject. So the* MISS HUXTABLES *never openly asked each other what the marriage of the youngest of them might imply; perhaps they never even asked themselves. Besides,* JANE *didn't marry. But if she does, unless, perhaps, she runs away to do it, there will be heart searchings, at least.* MR. HUXTABLE *asked, though, and* MRS. HUXTABLE'S *answer—given early one morning, before the hot water came—scarcely satisfied him. "For," said* MR. HUXTABLE, *"if the girls don't marry some day, what are they to do! It's not as if they had to go into the shop." "No, thank Heaven!" said* MRS. HUXTABLE.

Since his illness MR. HUXTABLE *has taken to asking questions—of anybody and about anything; of himself oftenest of all. But for that illness he would have been a conventional enough type of successful shopkeeper, coarsely fed, whiskered, podgy. But eighteen months' nursing and dieting and removal from the world seem to have brought a gentleness to his voice, a spark of humour to his eye, a childishness*

to his little bursts of temper—they have added, in fact, a wistfulness which makes him rather a loveable old buffer on the whole.

This is a Sunday morning, a bright day in October. The family are still at church, and the drawing-room is empty. The door opens, and the parlour-maid —much becapped and aproned—shews in PHILIP MADRAS *and his friend,* MAJOR HIPPISLY THOMAS. THOMAS, *long legged and deliberate, moves across the room to the big French windows, which open onto a balcony and look down on the garden and to many gardens beyond. Thomas is a good fellow.*

PHILIP MADRAS *is more complex than that. To begin with, it is obvious he is not wholly English A certain likeness of figure, the keenness and colour of his voice, and a liking for metaphysical turns of speech, shew an Eastern origin, perhaps. He is kind in manner, but rather cold, capable of that least English of dispositions—intellectual passion. He is about thirty-five, a year or two younger than his friend. The parlour-maid has secured* MAJOR THOMAS'S *hat, and stands clutching it. As* PHILIP *passes her into the room he asks . . .*

PHILIP. About how long?

THE MAID. In just a few minutes now, I should say, sir. Oh, I beg pardon, does it appen to be the third Sunday in the month?

PHILIP. I don't know. Tommy, does it?

THOMAS. [*From the window.*] Don't ask me. Well, I suppose I can tell you. [*And he vaguely fishes for his diary.*]

THE MAID. No, I don't think it does, sir. Because then some of them stop for the Oly Communion, and that may make them late for dinner, but I don't think it is, sir.

She backs through the door, entangling the hat in the handle.

PHILIP. Is my mother still staying here?

THE MAID. Mrs. Madras, sir? Yes, sir.

Then having disentangled the hat, the parlour-maid vanishes. PHILIP *thereupon plunges swiftly into what must be an interrupted argument.*

PHILIP. Well, my dear Tommy, what are the two most important things in a man's character? His attitude towards money and his attitude towards women.

THOMAS. [*Ponderously slowing him up.*] Yes, you're full up with moral precepts. Why behave about money as if it didn't exist? I never said don't join the County Council.

PHILIP. [*Deliberately, but in a breath.*] It is quite impossible for any decent man to walk with his eyes open from Waterloo to Denmark Hill on a Sunday morning without wishing me to stand for the County Council.

THOMAS *entrenches himself on a sofa.*

THOMAS. You've got what I call the Reformer's mind. I shouldn't cultivate it, Phil. It makes a man unhappy and discontented, not with himself, but with other people, mark you . . . so it makes him conceited, and puts him out of condition both ways. Don't you get to imagine you can make this country better by tidying it up.

PHILIP. [*Whimsically.*] But I'm very interested in England, Tommy.

THOMAS. [*Not without some answering humour.*] We all are. But we don't all need to go about saying so. Even I can be interested in England, I suppose, though I have had to chuck the Army and take to business to earn bread and treacle for a wife and four children . . . and not a bad thing for me, either. I tell you if every chap would look after himself and his family, and lead a godly, righteous and sober life—I'm sorry, but it is Sunday—

England would get on a damn sight better than it will with all your interference.

He leans back. PHILIP'S *eyes fix themselves on some great distance.*

PHILIP. It's a muddled country. One's first instinct is to be rhetorical about it . . . to write poetry and relieve one's feelings. I once thought I might be self-sacrificing —give my goods to the poor, and go slumming—keeping my immortal soul superior still. There's something wrong with a world, Tommy, in which it takes a man like me all his time to find out that it's bread people want, and not either cake or crumbs.

THOMAS. There's something wrong with a man while he will think of other people as if they were ants on an ant heap.

PHILIP. [*Relaxing to a smile.*] Tommy, that's perfectly true. I like having a good talk with you: sooner or later you always say one sensible thing.

THOMAS. Thank you; you're damn polite. And, as usual, we've got right off the point.

PHILIP. The art of conversation!

THOMAS. [*Shying at the easy epigram.*] Go on six County Councils, if you like. But why chuck up seven hundred a year and a directorship, if State wants you to keep 'em? And you could have double or more, and manage the place, if you'd ask for it.

PHILIP. [*Almost venomously.*] Tommy, I loathe the Madras House. State may buy it, and do what he likes with it.

JULIA *and* LAURA *arrive. They are the first from Church. Sunday frocks, Sunday hats, best gloves, umbrellas and prayer books.*

JULIA. Oh, what a surprise!

PHILIP. Yes, we walked down. Ah, you don't know

. . . Let me introduce Major Hippisly Thomas . . . my cousin, Miss Julia Huxtable . . . and Miss Huxtable.

JULIA. How do you do?

THOMAS. How do you do?

LAURA. How do you do?

JULIA. Have you come to see Aunt Amy?

PHILIP. No, your father.

JULIA. He's walking back with her. They'll be last, I'm afraid.

LAURA. Will you stay to dinner?

PHILIP. No, I think not.

LAURA. I'd better tell them you won't. Perhaps they'll be laying for you.

> LAURA *goes out, decorously avoiding a collision with* EMMA, *who, panoplied as the others, comes in at the same moment.*

PHILIP. Hullo, Emma!

EMMA. Well, what a surprise!

PHILIP. You don't know . . . Major Hippisly Thomas . . . Miss Emma Huxtable.

THOMAS. How do you do?

EMMA. How do you do? Will you stay to dinner?

PHILIP. No, we can't. [*That formula again completed, he varies his explanation.*] I've just brought Thomas a Sunday morning walk to help me tell Uncle Henry a bit of news. My father will be back in England to-morrow.

EMMA. [*With a round mouth.*] Oh!

JULIA. It's a beautiful morning for a walk, isn't it?

THOMAS. Wonderful for October.

> *These two look first at each other, and then out of the window.* EMMA *gazes quizzically at* PHILIP.

EMMA. I think he knows.

PHILIP. He sort of knows.

EMMA. Why are you being odd, Philip?

PHILIP *is more hail-fellow-well-met with* EMMA *than with the others.*

PHILIP. Emma . . . I have enticed a comparative stranger to be present so that your father and mother cannot, in decency, begin to fight the family battle over again with me. I know it's very cunning, but we did want a walk. Besides, there's a meeting to-morrow. . . .

JANE *peeps through the door.*

JANE. You? Mother!

She has turned to the hall, and from the hall comes MRS. HUXTABLE'S *rotund voice, "Yes, Jane!"*

JANE. Cousin Philip!

MRS. HUXTABLE *sails in, and superbly compresses every family greeting into one.*

MRS. HUXTABLE. What a surprise! Will you stay to dinner?

EMMA. [*Alive to a certain redundancy.*] No, Mother, they can't.

PHILIP. May I introduce my friend . . . Major Hippisly Thomas . . . my aunt, Mrs. Huxtable.

MRS. HUXTABLE. [*Stately and gracious.*] How do you do, Major Thomas?

PHILIP. Thomas is Mr. Eustace State's London manager.

THOMAS. How do you do?

MRS. HUXTABLE *takes an armchair with the air of one mounting a throne, and from that vantage point begins polite conversation. Her daughters distribute themselves, so do* PHILIP *and* HIPPISLY THOMAS.

MRS. HUXTABLE. Not in the Army, then, Major Thomas?

THOMAS. I was in the Army.

EMMA. Jessica quite well, Philip?

PHILIP. Yes, thanks.

EMMA. And Mildred?

PHILIP. I think so. She's back at school.

MRS. HUXTABLE. A wonderfully warm autumn, is it not?

THOMAS. Quite.

MRS. HUXTABLE. Do you know Denmark Hill well?

THOMAS. Not well.

MRS. HUXTABLE. We have always lived here. I consider it healthy. But London is a healthy place, I think. Oh, I beg your pardon . . . my daughter Jane.

JANE. How do you do?

They shake hands with ceremony. EMMA, *in a mind to liven things up, goes to the window.*

EMMA. We've quite a good garden, that's one thing.

THOMAS. [*Not wholly innocent of an attempt to escape from his hostess, makes for the window, too.*] I noticed it. I am keen on gardens.

MRS. HUXTABLE. [*Her attention distracted by* JULIA'S *making for the door.*] Julia, where are you going?

JULIA. To take my things off, Mother.

JULIA *departs. When they were quite little girls* MRS. HUXTABLE *always did ask her daughters where they were going when they left the room, and where they had been when they entered it, and she has never dropped the habit. They resent it only by the extreme patience of their replies.*

EMMA. [*Entertainingly.*] That's the Crystal Palace.

THOMAS. Is it?

They both peer appreciatively at that famous landmark. In the Crystal Palace and the sunset the inhabitants of Denmark Hill have acquired almost proprietary interest. Then MRS. HUXTABLE *speaks to her nephew with a sudden severity.*

MRS. HUXTABLE. Philip, I don't consider your mother's health is at all the thing.

PHILIP. [*Amicably.*] It never is, Aunt Kate.

MRS. HUXTABLE. [*Admitting the justice of the retort.*] That's true.

PHILIP. Uncle Henry keeps better, I think.

MRS. HUXTABLE. He's well enough now. I have had a slight cold. Is it true that your father may appear in England again?

PHILIP. Yes, he has only been on the Continent. He arrives to-morrow.

MRS. HUXTABLE. I'm sorry.

JANE. Mother!

> MRS. HUXTABLE *has launched this with such redoubled severity that* JANE *had to protest. However, at this moment arrives* MR. HUXTABLE *himself, one glad smile.*

MR. HUXTABLE. Ah, Phil . . . I ad an idea you might come over. You'll stay to dinner. Jane, tell your aunt . . . she's taking er bonnet off.

> JANE *obeys. He sights on the balcony* MAJOR THOMAS'S *back.*

MR. HUXTABLE. Who's that outside?

PHILIP. Hippisly Thomas. We wanted a walk; we can't stay.

MR. HUXTABLE. Oh!

MRS. HUXTABLE. Have you come on business?

PHILIP. Well . . .

MRS. HUXTABLE. On Sunday?

PHILIP. Not exactly.

> *She shakes her head, gravely deprecating.* THOMAS *comes from the balcony.*

MR. HUXTABLE. How are you?

THOMAS. How are *you*?

MR. HUXTABLE. Fine morning, isn't it? Nice prospect, this . . . see the Crystal Palace?

> *While* THOMAS *turns, with perfect politeness, to*

view again this phenomenon, PHILIP *pacifies his aunt.*

PHILIP. You see, Aunt Katherine, to-morrow afternoon we have the first real conference with this Mr. State about buying up the two firms, and my father is passing through England again to attend it.

MRS. HUXTABLE. Of course, Philip, if it's business, I know nothing about it. But is it suggested that your uncle should attend, too?

Her voice has found a new gravity. PHILIP *becomes very airy; so does* MR. HUXTABLE, *who comes back to rejoin the conversation.*

PHILIP. My dear aunt, naturally.

MR. HUXTABLE. What's this?

MRS. HUXTABLE. [*The one word expressing volumes.*] Constantine.

MR. HUXTABLE. [*With elaborate innocence.*] That's definite now, is it?

MRS. HUXTABLE. You dropped a hint last night, Henry.

MR. HUXTABLE. I dessay. I dessay I did. [*His eye shifts guiltily.*]

MRS. HUXTABLE. Quite out of the question, it seems to me.

JANE *comes back.*

JANE. Aunt Mary's coming.

MR. HUXTABLE. [*Genial again.*] Oh! My daughter Jane . . . Major Thomas, Major Hippisly Thomas.

JANE. [*With discretion.*] Yes, Father.

MRS. HUXTABLE. [*Tactfully.*] You are naturally not aware, Major Thomas, that for family reasons, into which we need not go, Mr. Huxtable has not spoken to his brother-in-law for a number of years.

PHILIP'S *eye meets* THOMAS'S *in comic agony. But* MR. HUXTABLE, *too, plunges delightedly into the forbidden subject.*

MR. HUXTABLE. Thirty years, very near. Wonderful, isn't it? Interested in the same business. Wasn't easy to keep it up.

THOMAS. I had heard.

MR. HUXTABLE. Oh, yes, notorious.

MRS. HUXTABLE. [*In reprobation.*] And well it may be, Henry.

> MRS. MADRAS *comes in. It is evident that* PHILIP *is his father's son. He would seem so wholly but for that touch of "self worship which is often self mistrust;" his mother's gift, appearing nowadays less loveably in her as a sort of querulous assertion of her rights and wrongs against the troubles which have been too strong for her. She is a pale old lady, shrunk a little, the life gone out of her.*

MRS. HUXTABLE. [*Some severity remaining.*] Amy, your husband is in England again.

> PHILIP *presents a filial cheek. It is kissed.*

PHILIP. How are you, Mother?

MR. HUXTABLE. [*Sotto voce.*] Oh, tact, Katherine, tact!

PHILIP. Perhaps you remember Reggie Thomas?

THOMAS. I was at Marlborough with Philip, Mrs. Madras.

MRS. MADRAS. Yes. Is he, Katherine?

> *Having given* THOMAS *a limp hand, and her sister this coldest of responses, she finds her way to a sofa, where she sits silent, thinking to herself.* MRS. HUXTABLE *keeps majestic hold upon her subject.*

MRS. HUXTABLE. I am utterly unable to see, Philip, why your uncle should break through his rule now.

MR. HUXTABLE. There you are, Phil!

PHILIP. Of course it is quite for Uncle Henry to decide.

MR. HUXTABLE. Naturally . . . naturally. [*Still he has an appealing eye on* PHILIP, *who obliges him.*]

PHILIP. But since Mr. State's offer may not be only for the Madras House, but Roberts and Huxtable into the bargain . . . if the two principal proprietors can't meet him round a table to settle the matter . . .

THOMAS. [*Ponderously diplomatic.*] Yes . . . a little awkward . . . if I may say so . . . as Mr. State's representative, Mrs. Huxtable.

MRS. HUXTABLE. You don't think, do you, Major Thomas, that any amount of awkwardness should induce us to pass over wicked conduct?

This reduces the assembly to such a shamed silence that poor MR. HUXTABLE *can only add——*

MR. HUXTABLE. Oh, talk of something else . . . talk of something else.

After a moment MRS. MADRAS'S *pale voice steals in, as she turns to her son.*

MRS. MADRAS. When did you hear from your father?

PHILIP. A letter from Marienbad two or three days ago, and a telegram yesterday morning.

MRS. HUXTABLE, *with a hostess's authority, now restores a polite and easy tone to the conversation.*

MRS. HUXTABLE. And have you left the Army long, Major Thomas?

THOMAS. Four years.

MRS. HUXTABLE. Now what made you take to the Drapery Trade?

PHILIP. [*Very explanatory.*] Mr. State is an American financier, Aunt Kitty, who has bought up Burrow's, the big mantle place in the city, and is about to buy us up, too, perhaps.

MRS. HUXTABLE. We are not in difficulties, I hope.

PHILIP. Oh, no.

MRS. HUXTABLE. No. No doubt Henry would have told me if we had been.

As she thus gracefully dismisses the subject there appear up the steps and along the balcony the last arrivals from Church, MINNIE *and* CLARA. *The male part of the company unsettles itself.*

MR. HUXTABLE. Ullo! Where have you been?

MINNIE. We went for a walk.

MRS. HUXTABLE. [*In apparently deep surprise.*] A walk, Minnie! Where to?

MINNIE. Just the long way home. We thought we'd have time.

CLARA. Did you notice what a short sermon?

MR. HUXTABLE. Oh, may I . . . My daughter Clara . . . Major Ippisly Thomas. My daughter Minnie . . . Major Thomas.

The conventional chant begins.

MINNIE. How d' you do?

THOMAS. How d' you do?

CLARA. How d' you do?

MINNIE. How d' you do, Philip?

PHILIP. How d' you do?

CLARA. How d' you do?

PHILIP. How d' you do?

The chant over, the company re-settles; MR. HUXTABLE *buttonholing* PHILIP *in the process with an air of some mystery.*

MR. HUXTABLE. By the way, Phil, remind me to ask you something before you go . . . rather important.

PHILIP. I shall be at your place in the morning. Thomas is coming to go through some figures.

MR. HUXTABLE. [*With a regular snap.*] Yes . . . I shan't.

PHILIP. The State meeting is in Bond Street, three o'clock.

MR. HUXTABLE. I know, I know. [*Then, finding himself prominent, he captures the conversation.*] I'm slacking off, Major Thomas, slacking off. Ever since I was ill I've been slacking off.

MRS. HUXTABLE. You are perfectly well now, Henry.

MR. HUXTABLE. Not the point. I want leisure, you know, leisure. Time for reading . . . time to think a bit.

MRS. HUXTABLE. Nonsense! [*She adds, with correctness.*] Major Thomas will excuse me.

MR. HUXTABLE. [*On his hobby.*] Oh, well . . . a man must . . . some portion of his life . . .

THOMAS. Quite. I got most of my reading done early.

MRS. HUXTABLE. The natural time for it.

MR. HUXTABLE. Ah, lucky feller! Educated, I suppose. Well, I wasn't. I've been getting the books for years—good editions. I'd like you to see my library. But these geniuses want settling down to . . . if a man's to keep pace with the thought of the world, y' know. Macaulay, Erbert Spencer, Grote's Istory of Greece! I've got em all there.

He finds no further response. MRS. HUXTABLE *fills the gap.*

MRS. HUXTABLE. I thought the sermon dull this morning, Amy, didn't you?

MRS. MADRAS. [*Unexpectedly.*] No, I didn't.

MINNIE. [*To do her share of the entertaining.*] Mother, somebody ought to speak about those boys . . . it's disgraceful. Mr. Vivian had actually to turn round from the organ at them during the last hymn.

JULIA, *her things taken off, re-appears.* MR. HUXTABLE *is on the spot.*

MR. HUXTABLE. Ah, my daughter Julia . . . Major——

JULIA. We've been introduced, Father.

She says this with a hauteur which really is pure

nervousness, but MR. HUXTABLE *is sufficiently crushed.*

MR. HUXTABLE. Oh, I beg pardon.

But MRS. HUXTABLE *disapproves of any self-assertion, and descends upon the culprit; who is, for some obscure reason (or for none), more often disapproved of than the others.*

MRS. HUXTABLE. Close the door, please, Julia.

JULIA. I'm sorry, Mother.

PHILIP *closes the offending door.* JULIA *obliterates herself in a chair, and the conversation, hardly encouraged by this little affray, comes to an intolerable standstill. At last* CLARA *makes an effort.*

CLARA. Is Jessica quite well, Philip?

PHILIP. Yes, thank you, Clara.

MRS. HUXTABLE. And dear little Mildred?

PHILIP. Yes, thank you, Aunt Kate.

Further standstill. Then MINNIE *contrives a remark.*

MINNIE. Do you still like that school for her?

PHILIP. [*With finesse.*] It seems to provide every accomplishment that money can buy.

MRS. HUXTABLE *discovers a sure opening.*

MRS. HUXTABLE. Have you been away for the summer, Major Thomas?

THOMAS. [*Vaguely—he is getting sympathetically tongue-tied.*] Oh . . . yes . . .

PHILIP. Tommy and Jessica and I took our holidays motoring around Munich and into it for the operas.

MRS. HUXTABLE. Was that pleasant?

PHILIP. Very.

MRS. HUXTABLE. And where was dear Mildred?

PHILIP. With her aunt most of the time . . . Jessica's sister-in-law, you know.

MINNIE. Lady Ames?

PHILIP. Yes.

MRS. HUXTABLE. [*Innocently, genuinely snobbish.*] Very nice for her.

MR. HUXTABLE. We take a ouse at Weymouth, as a rule.

MRS. HUXTABLE. Do you know Weymouth, Major Thomas?

THOMAS. No, I don't.

MRS. HUXTABLE. George III used to stay there, but that is a hotel now.

MR. HUXTABLE. Keep your spare money in the country, y' know.

MRS. HUXTABLE. Oh, there is everything one wants at Weymouth.

But even this subject flags.

MRS. HUXTABLE. You think more of Bognor, Amy, I know.

MRS. MADRAS. Only to live in, Katherine.

They have made their last effort. The conversation is dead. MR. HUXTABLE'S *discomfort suddenly becomes physical.*

MR. HUXTABLE. I'm going to change my coat.

PHILIP. I think perhaps we ought to be off.

MR. HUXTABLE. No, no, no, no, no! I shan't be a minute. Don't go, Phil; there's a good fellow.

And he has left them all to it. The HUXTABLE *conversation, it will be noticed, consists mainly of asking questions. Visitors, after a time, fall into the habit, too.*

PHILIP. Do you like this house better than the old one, Clara?

CLARA. It has more rooms, you know.

MRS. HUXTABLE. Do you live in London, Major Thomas?

THOMAS. No, I live at Woking. I come up and down every day. I think the country's better for the children.

MRS. HUXTABLE. Not a cheerful place, is it?

THOMAS. Oh, very cheerful.

MRS. HUXTABLE. I had thought not, for some reason.

EMMA. The cemetery, Mother.

MRS. HUXTABLE. [*Accepting the suggestion with dignity.*] Perhaps.

CLARA. And of course there's a much larger garden. We have the garden of the next house as well.

JANE. Not all the garden of the next house.

CLARA. Well, most of it.

This stimulating difference of opinion takes them to the balcony. PHILIP *follows.* JULIA *follows* PHILIP. MINNIE *departs to take her things off.*

JULIA. Do you notice how near the Crystal Palace seems? That means rain.

PHILIP. Of course . . . you can see the Crystal Palace.

MRS. HUXTABLE. Julia, do you think you won't catch cold on the balcony without a hat?

JULIA. [*Meek, but, before the visitor, determined.*] I don't think so, Mother.

MRS. HUXTABLE *turns, with added politeness, to* MAJOR THOMAS.

MRS. HUXTABLE. Yes, we used to live not so far along the hill; it certainly was a smaller house.

PHILIP *is now on the balcony, receiving more information.*

PHILIP. That's Ruskin's house, is it? Yes, I see the chimney pots.

MRS. HUXTABLE. I should not have moved, myself, but I was overruled.

EMMA. Mother, we had grown out of Hollybank.

MRS. HUXTABLE. I was overruled. Things are done on a larger scale than they used to be. Not that I approve of that.

THOMAS. Of course one's family will grow up.

MRS. HUXTABLE. People spend their money now-a-days. I remember my father's practice was to live on half his income. However, he lost the greater part of his money by unwise investments in lead, I think it was. I was at school at the time, in Brighton. And he educated me above my station in life.

At this moment CLARA *breaks out of the conservatory. Something has happened.*

CLARA. Jane, the Agapanthus is out at last!

JANE. Oh!

They crowd in to see it. PHILIP *crowds in, too.* MRS. HUXTABLE *is unmoved.*

MRS. HUXTABLE. We are told that riches are a snare, Major Thomas.

THOMAS. It is one I have always found easy to avoid, Mrs. Huxtable.

MRS. HUXTABLE. [*Oblivious of the joke, which, indeed, she would not have expected on such a subject.*] And I have noticed that their acquisition seldom improves the character of people in my station of life. I am, of course, ignorant of my husband's affairs . . . that is to say, I keep myself as ignorant as possible . . . but it is my wish that the ordering of our household should remain as it was when we were first married.

THOMAS. [*Forestalling a yawn.*] Quite so. Quite so.

MRS. HUXTABLE *takes a breath.*

MRS. HUXTABLE. A family of daughters, Major Thomas . . .

EMMA. [*A little agonised.*] Mother!

MRS. HUXTABLE. What is it, Emma?

But EMMA *thinks better of it, and goes to join the Agapanthus party, saying——*

EMMA. Nothing, Mother. I beg your pardon.

MRS. HUXTABLE *retakes her breath.*

MRS. HUXTABLE. What were we saying?

THOMAS. [*With resigned politeness.*] A family of daughters.

MRS. HUXTABLE. Yes. Were you in the war?

The inexplicable but characteristic suddenness of this rouses the MAJOR *a little.*

THOMAS. I was.

MRS. HUXTABLE. I find that people look differently on family life to what they used. A man no longer seems prepared to marry and support a wife and family by his unaided exertions. I consider that a pity.

THOMAS. [*Near another yawn.*] Quite . . . quite so.

MRS. HUXTABLE. I have always determined that my daughters should be sought after for themselves alone. That should ensure their happiness. Any eligible gentleman who visits here constantly is always given to understand, delicately, that nothing need be expected from Mr. Huxtable beyond his approval. You a r e married, I think you said, Major Thomas.

This quite wakes him up, though MRS. HUXTABLE *is really innocent of her implication.*

THOMAS. Yes. Oh, dear me, yes.

MRS. HUXTABLE. And a family?

THOMAS. Four children . . . the youngest is only three.

MRS. HUXTABLE. Pretty dear!

THOMAS. No; ugly little beggar, but has character.

MRS. HUXTABLE. I must take off my things before dinner. You'll excuse me. If one is not punctual oneself . . .

THOMAS. Quite.

MRS. HUXTABLE. We cannot induce you to join us?

THOMAS. Many thanks, but we have to meet Mrs. Phil for lunch in town at two.

MRS. HUXTABLE. I am sorry.

THOMAS *opens the door for her with his best bow, and she graciously departs, conscious of having properly impressed him.* CLARA, *who has now her*

things to take off, crosses the room, saying to PHILIP, *who follows her from the balcony*——

CLARA. Yes, I'll tell father, Philip. I'm going upstairs.

THOMAS *opens the door for her, but only with his second best bow, and then turns to* PHILIP *with a sigh.*

THOMAS. Phil, we ought to be going.

PHILIP. Wait till you've seen my uncle again.

THOMAS. All right.

He heaves another sigh and sits down. All this time there has been MRS. MADRAS *upon her sofa, silent, as forgotten as any other piece of furniture for which there is no immediate use.* PHILIP *now goes to her. When she does speak it is unresponsively.*

PHILIP. How long do you stay in town, Mother?

MRS. MADRAS. I have been here a fortnight. I generally stay three weeks.

PHILIP. Jessica has been meaning to ask you to Phillimore Gardens again.

MRS. MADRAS. Has she?

PHILIP. [*A little guiltily.*] Her time's very much occupied . . . with one thing and another.

Suddenly MRS. MADRAS *rouses herself.*

MRS. MADRAS. I wish to see your father, Philip.

PHILIP. [*In doubt.*] He won't be here long, Mother.

MRS. MADRAS. No, I am sure he won't.

With three delicate strides THOMAS *lands himself onto the balcony.*

PHILIP. Tommy being tactful! Well, I'll say that you want to see him.

MRS. MADRAS. No, please don't. Tell him that I think he ought to come and see me.

PHILIP. He won't come, Mother.

MRS. MADRAS. No, I know he won't. He came to Eng-

land in May, didn't he? He was here till July, wasn't he? Did he so much as send me a message?

PHILIP. [*With unkind patience.*] No, Mother.

MRS. MADRAS. What was he doing all the while, Philip?

PHILIP. I didn't see much of him. I really don't know what he came back for at all. We could have done this business without him, and anyway it hasn't materialised till now. This is why he's passing through England again. I don't think there's much to be gained by your seeing him, you know.

MRS. MADRAS. You are a little heartless, Philip.

This being a little true, PHILIP *a little resents it.*

PHILIP. My dear mother, you and he have been separated for . . . how long is it?

MRS. MADRAS. [*With withered force.*] I am his wife still, I should hope. He went away from me when he was young. But I have never forgotten my duty. And now that he is an old man, and past such sin, and I am an old woman, I am still ready to be a comfort to his declining years, and it's right that I should be allowed to tell him so. And you should not let your wife put you against your own mother, Philip.

PHILIP. [*Bewildered.*] Really!

MRS. MADRAS. I know what Jessica thinks of me. Jessica is very clever, and has no patience with people who can only do their best to be good . . . I understand that. Well, it isn't her duty to love me . . . at least it may not be her duty to love her husband's mother, or it may be, I don't say. But it is your duty. I sometimes think, Philip, you don't love me any longer, though you're afraid to say so.

The appeal ends so pathetically that PHILIP *is very gently equivocal.*

PHILIP. If I didn't love you, my dear mother, I should be afraid to say so.

MRS. MADRAS. When are you to see your father?

PHILIP. We've asked him to dinner to-morrow night.

At this moment EMMA *comes in with a briskness so jarring to* MRS. MADRAS'S *already wrought nerves, that she turns on her.*

MRS. MADRAS. Emma, why do you come bouncing in like that when I'm trying to get a private word with Philip?

EMMA. Really, Aunt Amy, the drawing-room belongs to everyone.

MRS. MADRAS. I'm sure I don't know why I come and stay here at all. I dislike your mother intensely.

EMMA. Then kindly don't tell me so. I've no wish not to be polite to you.

PHILIP. [*Pacifically.*] Emma, I think Uncle Henry ought to attend this meeting to-morrow.

MRS. MADRAS. [*Beginning to cry.*] Of course he ought. Who is he, to go on like this about Constantine! My handkerchief's upstairs.

EMMA. [*Contritely.*] Shall I fetch it for you, Aunt Amy?

MRS. MADRAS. No. I'll be a trouble to no one.

She retires, injured. PHILIP *continues, purposely placid.*

PHILIP. What's more, he really wants to attend it.

EMMA. I'm sorry I was rude . . . but she does get on our nerves, you know.

PHILIP. Why do you invite her?

EMMA. [*Quite jolly with him.*] Oh, we're all very fond of Aunt Amy, and anyhow, mother would think it our duty. I don't see how she can enjoy coming, though. She never goes out anywhere . . . never joins in the conversation . . . just sits nursing herself.

PHILIP. [*Quizzically.*] You're all too good, Emma.

EMMA. Yes. I heard you making fun of Julia in the

conservatory. But if one stopped doing one's duty how upside down the world would be! [*Her voice now takes that tone which is the well-bred substitute for a wink.*] I say . . . I suppose I oughtn't to tell you about Julia, but it is rather a joke. You know, Julia gets hysterical sometimes, when she has her headaches.

PHILIP. Does she?

EMMA. Well, a collar marked Lewis Waller came back from the wash in mistake for one of father's. I don't think he lives near here, but it's one of these big steam laundries. And Morgan the cook got it, and she gave it to Julia . . . and Julia kept it. And when mother found out she cried for a whole day. She said it showed a wanton mind.

PHILIP'S *mocking face becomes grave.*

PHILIP. I don't think that's at all amusing, Emma.

EMMA. [*In genuine surprise.*] Don't you?

PHILIP. How old is Julia?

EMMA. She's thirty-four. [*Her face falls, too.*] No . . . it is rather dreadful, isn't it? [*Then wrinkling her forehead, as at a puzzle.*] It isn't exactly that one wants to get married. I daresay mother is right about that.

PHILIP. About what?

EMMA. Well, some time ago a gentleman proposed to Jane. And mother said it would have been more honourable if he had spoken to father first, and that Jane was the youngest, and too young to know her own mind. Well, you know, she's twenty-six. And then they heard of something he'd once done, and it was put a stop to. And Jane was very rebellious, and mother cried. . . .

PHILIP. Does she always cry?

EMMA. Yes, she does cry, if she's upset about us. And I think she was right. One ought not to risk being unhappy for life, ought one?

PHILIP. Are you all happy now, then?

EMMA. Oh, deep down, I think we are. It would be so ungrateful not to be. When one has a good home and . . . ! But of course living together, and going away together, and being together all the time, one does get a little irritable now and then. I suppose that's why we sit as mum as maggots when people are here; we're afraid of squabbling.

PHILIP. Do you squabble?

EMMA. Not like we used. You know, till we moved into this house, we had only two bedrooms between us, the nursery and the old night nursery. Now Laura and Minnie have one each, and there's one we take by turns. There wasn't a bigger house to be got here, or I suppose we could have had it. They hated the idea of moving far. And it's rather odd, you know, father seems afraid of spending money, though he must have got lots. He says if he gave us any more we shouldn't know what to do with it, . . . and of course that's true.

PHILIP. But what occupations have you girls?

EMMA. We're always busy. I mean there's lots to be done about the house, and there's calling and classes and things. Julia used to sketch quite well. You mustn't think I'm grumbling, Philip. I know I talk too much. They tell me so.

PHILIP'S *comment is the question, half serious.*

PHILIP. Why don't you go away, all six of you, or say five of you?

EMMA. [*Wide-eyed.*] Go away!

PHILIP. [*Comprehensively.*] Out of it.

EMMA. [*Wider-eyed.*] Where to?

PHILIP. [*With a sigh—for her.*] Ah, that's just it.

EMMA. How could one! And it would upset them dreadfully. Father and mother don't know that one feels like this at times . . . they'd be very grieved.

PHILIP *turns to her with kindly irony.*

PHILIP. Emma, people have been worrying your father at the shop lately about the drawbacks of the living in system. Why don't you ask him to look at home for them?

MR. HUXTABLE *returns, at ease in a jacket. He pats his daughter kindly on the shoulder.*

MR. HUXTABLE. Now run along, Jane . . . I mean Emma . . . I want a word with your cousin.

EMMA. Yes, Father.

EMMA—*or* JANE—*obediently disappears.* PHILIP *then looks sideways at his uncle.*

PHILIP. I've come over, as you asked me to.

MR. HUXTABLE. I didn't ask you.

PHILIP. You dropped a hint.

MR. HUXTABLE. [*Almost with a blush.*] Did I? I dessay I did.

PHILIP. But you must hurry up and decide about the meeting to-morrow. Thomas and I have got to go.

MR. HUXTABLE. Phil, I suppose you're set on selling.

PHILIP. Quite.

MR. HUXTABLE. You young men! The Madras 'Ouse means nothing to you.

PHILIP. [*Anti-sentimental.*] Nothing unsaleable, Uncle.

MR. HUXTABLE. Well, well, well! [*Then, in a furtive fuss.*] Well, just a minute, my boy, before your aunt comes down . . . she's been going on at me upstairs, y'know! Something you must do for me to-morrow, like a good feller, at the shop in the morning. [*He suddenly becomes portentous.*] Have you heard this yet about Miss Yates?

PHILIP. No.

MR. HUXTABLE. Disgraceful! Disgraceful!

PHILIP. She got on very well in Bond Street . . . learnt a good deal. She has only been back a few weeks.

MR. HUXTABLE. [*Snorting derisively.*] Learnt a good

deal! [*Then he sights* THOMAS *on the balcony, and hails him.*] Oh, come in, Major Thomas. [*And dropping his voice again ominously.*] Shut the window, if you don't mind; we don't want the ladies to hear this.

THOMAS *shuts the window, and* MR. HUXTABLE *spreads himself to the awful enjoyment of imparting scandal.*

MR. HUXTABLE. I tell you, my boy, up at your place, got hold of she's been by some feller . . . some West End Club feller, I dessay . . . and he's put her in the . . . well, I tell you!! Major Thomas will excuse me. Not a chit of a girl, mind you, but first hand in our Costume room. Buyer we were going to make her, and all!

PHILIP *frowns, both at the news and at his uncle's manner of giving it.*

PHILIP. What do you want me to do?

MR. HUXTABLE. [*More portentous than ever.*] You wait; that's not the worst of it. You know Brigstock.

PHILIP. Do I?

MR. HUXTABLE. Oh, yes; third man in the Osiery.

PHILIP. True.

MR. HUXTABLE. Well . . . it seems that more than a week ago Miss Chancellor had caught them kissing.

PHILIP. [*His impatience of the display growing.*] Caught w h o kissing?

MR. HUXTABLE. I know it ain't clear. Let's go back to the beginning . . . Major Thomas will excuse me.

THOMAS. [*Showing the properest feeling.*] Not at all.

MR. HUXTAI E. Wednesday afternoon, Willoughby, that's our doctor, comes up as usual. Miss Yates goes in to see him. Miss Chancellor—that's our housekeeper, Major Thomas—over'ears, quite by accident, so she says, and afterwards taxes her with it.

PHILIP. Unwise.

MR. HUXTABLE. No! no! Her plain duty . . . she

knows my principle about such things. But then she remembers about the kissing and that gets about among our young ladies. Somebody stupid there, I grant you, but you know what these things are. And then it gets about about Miss Yates . . . all over the shop. And then it turns out that Brigstock's a married man . . . been married two years . . . secret from us, you know, because he's living in and on promotion and all the rest. And yesterday morning his wife turns up in my office, and has hysterics, and says her husband's been slandered.

PHILIP. I don't see why Miss Yates should come to any particular harm at our place. A girl's only out of our sight at week ends, and then we're supposed to know where she is.

MR. HUXTABLE. [*Still instinctively spreading himself, but with that wistful look creeping on him now.*] Well . . . I had er up the day before. And I don't know what's coming over me. I scolded her well. I was in the right in all I said . . . but . . . ! Have you ever suddenly eard your own voice saying a thing? Well, I did . . . and it sounded more like a dog barking than me. And I went funny all over. So I told her to leave the room. [*He grows distressed and appealing.*] And you must take it on, Phil, . . . it ought to be settled to-morrow. Miss Yates must have the sack, and I'm not sure Brigstock hadn't better have the sack. We don't want to lose Miss Chancellor, but really if she can't hold er tongue at her age . . . well, she'd better have . . .

PHILIP. [*Out of patience.*] Oh, nonsense, Uncle!

MR. HUXTABLE. [*His old unquestioning self asserted for a moment.*] No, I will not have these scandals in the shop. We've always been free of em . . . almost always. I don't want to be hard on the girl. If the man's in our employ, and you can find im out . . . punish the guilty as well as the innocent . . . I'm for all that. [*That breath*

exhausted, he continues, quite pathetically, to THOMAS.] But I do not know what's coming over me. Before I got ill I'd have tackled this business like winking. But when you're a long time in bed . . . I'd never been ill like that before . . . I dunno how it is . . . you get thinking . . . and things which used to be quite clear don't seem nearly so clear . . . and then after, when you start to do and say the things that used to come natural . . . they don't come so natural as they did, and that puts you off something . . .

This is interrupted by the re-appearance of MRS. HUXTABLE, *lace-capped, and ready for dinner. She is at the pitch to which the upstairs dispute with her husband evidently brought her. It would seem he bolted in the middle of it.*

MRS. HUXTABLE. Is it the fact, Philip, that if your uncle does not attend the meeting to-morrow that this business transaction with Mr.—I forget his name—the American gentleman . . . and which I, of course, know nothing about, will be seriously upset?

MR. HUXTABLE. [*Joining battle.*] Kitty, I don't see why I shouldn't go. If Constantine chooses to turn up . . . that is his business. I needn't speak directly to him . . . so to say.

MRS. HUXTABLE. [*Hurling this choice bolt from her vocabulary.*] A quibble, Henry.

MR. HUXTABLE. If he's leaving England now for good . . .

MRS. HUXTABLE. But you do as you like, of course.

MR. HUXTABLE. [*Wistful again.*] I should so like you to be convinced.

MRS. HUXTABLE. Don't prevaricate, Henry. And your sister is just coming into the room. We had better drop the subject.

And in MRS. MADRAS *does come, but what with one*

thing and another MR. HUXTABLE *is now getting what he would call thoroughly put out.*

MR. HUXTABLE. Now if Amelia here was to propose seeing im——

MRS. HUXTABLE. Henry . . . a little consideration!

MR. HUXTABLE. [*Goaded to the truth.*] Well, I want to go, Kitty, and that's all about it. And I dropped a int, I did, to Phil to come over and help me through it with you. I thought he'd make it seem as if it was most pressing business . . . only he hasn't . . . so as to hurt your feelings less. Because I'd been bound to have told you afterwards, or it might have slipped out somehow. Goodness gracious me, here's the Madras House, which I've sunk enough money in these last ten years to build a battleship, very nearly . . . a small battleship, y'know . . . it's to be sold because Phil won't stand by me, and his father don't care a button now. Not but what that's Constantine all over! Marries you, Amelia, behaves like a duke and an archangel, mixed, for eighteen months, and then——

MRS. HUXTABLE. [*Scandalized, "Before visitors, too!"*] Henry!

MR. HUXTABLE. All right, all right. And I'm not to attend this meeting, if you please!

The little storm subsides.

MRS. MADRAS. It's to be sold, is it?

PHILIP. Yes, Mother.

MRS. MADRAS. [*At her brother.*] It was started with my money as well as yours.

MR. HUXTABLE *is recovering, and takes no notice.*

PHILIP. Yes, Mother, we know.

MRS. MADRAS. And if that's all you've lost by Constantine, I don't see you've a right to be so bitter against him.

She is still ignored. MR. HUXTABLE, *quite cheery again, goes on affably.*

MR. HUXTABLE. D'you know, Major Thomas, that

twenty years ago, when that shop began to be the talk of London, Duchesses have been known to go, to all intents and purposes, on their knees to him to design them a dress. Wouldn't do it unless he pleased—not unless he approved their figure. Ad Society under his thumb.

MRS. HUXTABLE. [*From the height of respectability.*] No doubt he knew his business.

MR. HUXTABLE. [*In an ecstasy.*] Knew his business! Knew his business!! My boy, in the old days . . . asked everywhere, like one of themselves, very nearly! First of his sort to break that barrier. D'you know, it's my belief that if Mrs. Gladstone had been thirty years younger, and a fashionable woman . . . he could have had a knighthood.

MRS. HUXTABLE. [*Explicitly.*] He was untrue to his wife, Henry.

> *At this* MR. HUXTABLE *is the moral man again. These sudden changes are so like him. They are genuine; he is just half conscious of their suddenness.*

MR. HUXTABLE. Yes, I know, and Amy did what she should have done. You see, it wasn't an ordinary case, Major Thomas. It was girls in the shop. And even though he took em out of the shop . . . that's a slur on the whole trade. A man in his position . . . you can't overlook that.

MRS. MADRAS. [*Palely asserting herself.*] I could have overlooked it if I had chosen.

PHILIP. [*To whom this is all so futile and foolish.*] My dear mother, you were unhappy with my father, and you left him . . . the matter is very simple.

MRS. MADRAS. I beg your pardon, Philip . . . I was not unhappy with him.

MRS. HUXTABLE. Amy, how could you be happy with a man who was unfaithful to you? What nonsense!

JANE *and* JULIA, *from the balcony, finding the window locked, tap with their finger-nails upon the pane. The very sharpness of the sound begins to put out* MR. HUXTABLE *again.*

MR. HUXTABLE. No, no! They can't come in! [*He mouths at them through the window.*] You can't come in.

JANE *mouths back.*

MR. HUXTABLE. What? [*Then the sense of it coming to him, he looks at his watch.*] No, it isn't . . . two minutes yet.

And he turns away, having excluded the innocent mind from this unseemly discussion. But at the very moment LAURA *comes in by the door. His patience flies.*

MR. HUXTABLE. Oh, damn! Well, I beg pardon. [*Then in desperate politeness.*] Let me introduce . . . my daughter Laura . . . Major Thomas.

LAURA. [*Collectedly.*] We have met, Father.

MR. HUXTABLE. [*Giving it all up.*] Well . . . how can I tell . . . there are so many of you!

MRS. HUXTABLE. [*Severely.*] I think, Henry, you had better go to this meeting to-morrow.

MR. HUXTABLE. [*Wistful for a moment.*] You think I ought?

MRS. HUXTABLE. You know you ought not.

MR. HUXTABLE. [*Disputing it manfully.*] No . . . I don't know I ought not. It isn't so easy to know what ought and ought not to be done as you always make out, Kitty. And suppose I just do something wrong for once, and see what happens.

MRS. HUXTABLE. Henry, don't say such things.

MR. HUXTABLE. [*Very reasonably to Major Thomas.*] Well, since I've been ill——

But EMMA *and* MINNIE *have come in now, and* JANE *and* JULIA, *finding their exile a little unreasonable,*

rattle hard at the window. MR. HUXTABLE *gives it all up again.*

MR. HUXTABLE. Oh, let em in, Phil . . . there's a good feller.

THOMAS. Allow me. [*And he does so.*]

EMMA. [*Crisply.*] Oh! what's it all been about?

MRS. HUXTABLE. Never mind, Emma.

She says this to EMMA *as she would have said it to her at the age of four. Meanwhile,* MR. HUXTABLE *has recovered.*

MR. HUXTABLE. You know, Major Thomas, Constantine could always get the better of me in little things.

JANE *has sighted* MINNIE, *and callously, across the breadth of the room, imparts a tragedy.*

JANE. Minnie, your frog's dead . . . in the conservatory.

MINNIE *pales.*

MINNIE. Oh, dear!

MR. HUXTABLE. . . . After the difference I began to write to him as Dear Sir; to this day he'll send me business letters beginning Dear 'Arry.

MINNIE *is hurrying to the glass house of death.*

JANE. I buried it.

MR. HUXTABLE. . . . Always at his ease, you know.

THOMAS *escapes from him.* PHILIP *is bending over his mother a little kindlier.*

PHILIP. I'll try to see you again before you go back to Bognor, Mother.

At this moment the gong rings. A tremendous gong, beloved of the English middle class, which makes any house seem small. A hollow sound; the dinner hour striking its own empty stomach. JANE, *whose things are not taken off, gives a mitigated yelp and dashes for the door, dashes into the returning, tidy* CLARA. MRS. HUXTABLE *shakes a finger.*

MRS. HUXTABLE. Late again, Jane.

PHILIP. We'll be off, Aunt Katherine.

MRS. HUXTABLE. [*With a common humanity she has not shewn before.*] Philip . . . never think I mean to be self-righteous about your father. But he made your mother most unhappy when you were too young to know of it . . . and there is the example to others, isn't there?

PHILIP. Yes . . . of course, Aunt Kate. I know just how you feel about it . . . I'm not fond of him, either.

PHILIP *must be a little mischievous with his aunt. She responds by returning at once to her own apparent self again.*

MRS. HUXTABLE. My dear boy . . . and your own father!

From the balcony one hears the tag of JULIA'S *entertaining of* MAJOR THOMAS. *They have been peering at the horizon.*

JULIA. Yes, it means rain . . . when you see it so clearly.

A general-post of leave-taking now begins.

PHILIP. Well, see you to-morrow, Uncle Henry.

MR. HUXTABLE. Yes, I suppose so. Oh, and about that other matter. . . .

PHILIP. What can I do?

MR. HUXTABLE. I'll telephone you in the morning.

PHILIP. Good-bye, Mother.

THOMAS. Good-bye, Mrs. Huxtable.

MRS. HUXTABLE. [*With a final flourish of politeness.*] You have excused this domestic discussion, I hope, Major Thomas . . . it will happen sometimes.

THOMAS. I've been most interested.

MINNIE *comes back sadly from the frog's grave.*

PHILIP. Good-bye, Clara.

CLARA. Good-bye, Philip.

MR. HUXTABLE. You really won't stay to dinner?

PHILIP. Good-bye, Laura.

THOMAS. Thanks, no. We meet to-morrow.

The general-post quickens, the chorus grows confused.

LAURA. Good-bye.

THOMAS. Good-bye.

JANE. Good-bye.

THOMAS. Good-bye.

PHILIP. Good-bye, Emma—oh, pardon.

There has been the confusion of crossed hands. Apologies, withdrawals, a treading on toes, more apologies.

EMMA. Good-bye, Major Thomas.

PHILIP. Now good-bye, Emma.

THOMAS. Good-bye, Mrs. Madras.

PHILIP. Good-bye.

THOMAS. Good-bye.

The chorus and the general-post continue, until at last PHILIP *and* THOMAS *escape to a tram and a tube and their lunch, while the* HUXTABLES *sit down in all ceremony to Sunday dinner: Roast beef, horse-radish, Yorkshire pudding, brown potatoes, Brussels sprouts, apple tart, custard and cream, Stilton cheese, dessert.*

ACT II

The business offices of Roberts and Huxtable are tucked away upon the first floor somewhere at the back of that large drapery establishment. The waiting-room —the one in which employee sits in shivering preparation for interviews with employer—besides thus having been the silent scene of more misery than most places on earth, is one of the very ugliest rooms that ever entered into the mind of a builder and decorator. Four plain walls of brick or plaster, with seats round them, would have left it a waiting-room pure and simple. But the ugly hand of the money maker was upon it. In the person of a contractor he thrust upon the unfortunate room—as on all the others—everything that could excuse his price and disguise his profit. The walls, to start with, were distempered an unobjectionable green, but as that might seem too plain and cheap, a dado of a nice stone colour was added, topped with stencilling in dirty red of a pattern that once was Greek.

The fireplace is apparently designed to provide the maximum amount of work possible for the wretched boy who cleans it every morning, retiring from the contest well black-leaded himself. The mantelpiece above—only an expert in such abominations knows what it is made of; but it pretends, with the aid of worm-shaped dashes of paint, to be brown marble.

It is too high for comfort, too low for dignity. It has to be dusted, and usually isn't.

The square lines of the two long windows, which look upon some sanitary brick airshaft, have been carefully spoilt by the ovalling of their top panes. The half glazed door, that opens from the passage, is of the wrong shape; the green baize door, that admits to MR. PHILIP'S *room, is of the wrong colour.*

And then the furnishing! Those yellow chairs upholstered in red cotton goose-flesh plush; that plush-seated, plush-backed bench, placed draughtily between the windows! There is a reasonable office table in the middle of the room. On the walls are, firstly, photographs of ROBERTS *and* HUXTABLE. ROBERTS *was a Welshman, and looks it. No prosperous drapery business in London but has its Welshman. There is also a photograph of the premises—actual; and an advertisement sketch of them—ideal. There is a ten-year-old fashion plate: twenty faultless ladies engaged in ladylike occupations or serene in the lack of any. There is an insurance almanac, the one thing of beauty in the room. On the mantelpiece lies a London Directory, the one piece of true colour.*

The hand of the money maker that has wrenched awry the Greek pattern on the wall has been laid also on all the four people who sit waiting for MR. PHILIP *at noon on this Monday; and to the warping more or less of them all.*

MRS. BRIGSTOCK, *sitting stiffly on the plush bench, in brown quilled hat and coat and skirt, is, one would guess, a clerk of some sort. She lacks colour; she lacks repose; she lacks—one stops to consider that she might possibly be a beautiful woman were it not for the things she lacks. But she is the product of*

fifteen years or so of long hours and little lunch. Certainly at this moment she is not seen at her best. She sits twisting her gloved hands, pulling at a loose thread, now and then biting it. Otherwise she bites her lips; her face is drawn, and she stares in front of her with only a twist of the eye now and then towards her husband, who is uncomfortable upon a chair a few feet away.

If one were asked to size up MR. BRIGSTOCK, *one would say: Nothing against him. The position of Third Man in the Hosiery does not require any special talents, and it doesn't get them; or if it does, they don't stay there. And* MR. BRIGSTOCK *stays there—just stays there. It sums him up—sums up millions of him—to say that in their youth they have energy enough to get into a position; afterwards, in their terror—or sometimes only because their employers have not the heart to dismiss them—they stay there. Sometimes, though, the employers have the heart, and do. And then what happens? Considered as a man rather than a wage earner—not that it is usual for us so to consider him—he is one of those who, happily for themselves, get married by women whom apparently no other man much wants to marry. Subdued to what he works in, he is dressed as a Third Man in the Hosiery should be. He is, at the moment, as agitated as his wife, and as he has no nervous force to be agitated with, is in a state of greater wretchedness.*

On the other side of the room sits MISS CHANCELLOR. *Every large living-in draper's should have as housekeeper a lady of a certain age, who can embody in her own person the virtues she will expect in the young ladies under her. Decorum, sobriety of thought, tidiness, respect of persons—these are the*

qualities generally necessary to a shop-assistant's salvation. MISS CHANCELLOR *radiates them. They are genuine in her, too. She is now planted squarely on her chair, as it might be, in easy authority, but looking closely, one may see that it is a dignified resentment keeping her there unmovable.*

In the middle of the room, by the table, sits MISS YATES. *While they wait this long time the other three try hard to keep their eyes off her. It isn't easy; partly because she is in the middle of the room and they are not. But anyhow and anywhere* MISS YATES *is a person that you look at, though you may ignorantly wonder why. She is by no means pretty, nor does she try to attract you. But you look at her as you look at a fire or a light in an otherwise empty room. She is not a lady, nor is she well educated, and ten years' shop-assisting has left its marks on her. But there it is. To the seeing eye she glows in that room like a live coal. She has genius—she has life, to however low a use she—or the world for her—may put it. And commoner people are lustreless beside her.*

They wait silently, and the tension increases. At last it is slightly relieved by PHILIP'S *arrival. He comes in briskly, his hat on, a number of unopened letters in his hand. They get up to receive him with varying degrees of respect and apprehension.*

PHILIP. Good morning, Miss Chancellor. Good morning, Miss Yates. Good morning, Mr. Brigstock.

MR. BRIGSTOCK. [*Introducing her.*] Mrs. Brigstock.

PHILIP *nods pleasantly to* MRS. BRIGSTOCK, *who purses her lips in a half-frightened, half-vengeful way, and sits down again. Then he puts his hat on the mantelpiece and settles himself in the master position at the table.*

PHILIP. I'm afraid I've kept you waiting a little. Well, now——

There is a sharp knock at the door.

PHILIP. Come.

It is BELHAVEN. BELHAVEN *is seventeen, perhaps, on the climb from office boy to clerk, of the usual pattern.* PHILIP *greets him pleasantly.*

PHILIP. Oh, good morning, Belhaven.

BELHAVEN. I've put Major Thomas in your room, sir, as the papers were there, but Mr. Huxtable's is empty, if you'd like . . .

PHILIP. No, this'll do.

BELHAVEN. Major Thomas said would you speak to him for a minute, as soon as you came.

PHILIP. I'll go in now.

BELHAVEN. Thank you, sir.

PHILIP. [*To the waiting four.*] Excuse me one minute, please.

BELHAVEN *bolts back to his outer office by one door —his way of opening and getting through it is a labour-saving invention; and* PHILIP *goes to find* THOMAS *through the other. There is silence again, held by these four at a greater tension than ever. At last* MRS. BRIGSTOCK, *least able to bear it, gives one desperate wriggle-fidget.* BRIGSTOCK *looks at her deprecatingly and says . . .*

MR. BRIGSTOCK. Will you sit here, Freda, if you feel the draught?

MRS. BRIGSTOCK. [*Just trusting herself to answer.*] No, thank you.

Silence again, but soon broken by PHILIP, *who comes from the other room, throwing over his shoulder the last of his few words with* THOMAS, *"All right, Tommy."* TOMMY, *even at the dullest business, always pleasantly amuses him. Then he*

settles himself at the table for the second time, conciliatory, kind.

PHILIP. Well, now . . .

MRS. BRIGSTOCK, *determined to be first heard, lets slip the torrent of her wrath.*

MRS. BRIGSTOCK. It's slander, Mr. Madras, and I request that it shall be retracted immediately . . . before everybody . . . in the public press . . . by advertisement.

MR. BRIGSTOCK. [*In an agonised whisper.*] Oh, Freda . . . not so eadstrong.

PHILIP *is elaborately cool and good tempered.*

PHILIP. Miss Chancellor.

MISS CHANCELLOR *is even more elaborately cold and dignified.*

MISS CHANCELLOR. Yes, sir.

PHILIP. I think we might inform Mrs. Brigstock that we're sorry the accusation has become so public . . . it has naturally caused her some pain.

MRS. BRIGSTOCK. [*Ascending the scale.*] I don't believe it . . . I didn't believe it . . . if I'd have believed it——

MR. BRIGSTOCK. [*Interposing.*] Oh, Freda!

MISS CHANCELLOR. [*Very definitely.*] I saw them kissing. I didn't know Mr. Brigstock was a married man. And even if I had known it . . . I saw them kissing.

MISS YATES, *opening her mouth for the first time, shows an easy impatience of their anger and their attitudes, too.*

MISS YATES. Oh . . . what sort of a kiss?

MISS CHANCELLOR. Are there different sorts of kisses, Miss Yates?

MISS YATES. Well . . . aren't there?

MRS. BRIGSTOCK. [*Growing shrill now.*] He owns he did that, and he knows he shouldn't have, and he asked my pardon . . . and whose business is it, but mine . . . ?

MR. BRIGSTOCK. [*Vainly interposing this time.*] Oh, Freda!

MRS. BRIGSTOCK. [*Climbing to hysterics.*] Hussy to let him . . . hussy . . . hussy!

PHILIP *adds a little severity to his coolness.*

PHILIP. Mrs. Brigstock.

MISS YATES. [*As pleasant as possible.*] All right . . . Mr. Madras, I don't mind.

PHILIP. But I do. Mrs. Brigstock, I shall not attempt to clear up this business unless we can all manage to keep our tempers.

MISS YATES *collectedly explains.*

MISS YATES. I've been friends with Mr. Brigstock these twelve years. We both came into the firm together . . . and I knew he was married . . . p'raps I'm the only one that did. And when I told him . . . all I chose to tell him as to what had happened to me . . . I asked him to kiss me just to show he didn't think so much the worse of me. And he gave me one kiss . . . here. [*She dabs with one finger the left top corner of her forehead.*] And that is the truth of that.

PHILIP. You might have given this explanation to Miss Chancellor.

MISS YATES. She wouldn't have believed it.

MISS CHANCELLOR. I don't believe it.

MRS. BRIGSTOCK. [*With gathering force.*] William! William!! William!!!

BRIGSTOCK *desperately musters a little authority.*

MR. BRIGSTOCK. Freda, be quiet . . . haven't I sworn it to you on the Bible?

MISS CHANCELLOR *now puts her case.*

MISS CHANCELLOR. I may say I have known other young ladies in trouble and whether they behaved properly or improperly under the circumstances . . . and I've known

them behave both . . . they did not confide in their gentlemen friends . . . without the best of reasons.

PHILIP. There is no reason that they shouldn't, Miss Chancellor.

MISS CHANCELLOR. They didn't.

MISS YATES. Well . . . I did.

MISS CHANCELLOR. I had no wish for the scandal to get about. I don't know how it happened.

MISS YATES. Ask your little favourite, Miss Jordan, how it happened.

This shot tells. MISS CHANCELLOR'S *voice sharpens.*

MISS CHANCELLOR. Mr. Madras, if I am to be accused of favouritism——

PHILIP. Yes, yes . . . we'll keep to the point, I think.

MISS CHANCELLOR. If Mr. Brigstock wasn't the man——

MRS. BRIGSTOCK. [*The spring touched.*] William!

MISS CHANCELLOR. Why shouldn't she tell me who it was?

MISS YATES. Why should I?

MISS CHANCELLOR. Am I here to look after the morals of these young ladies, or am I not?

MRS. BRIGSTOCK. A set of hussies.

MR. BRIGSTOCK. [*In agony.*] Freda, you'll get me the sack.

PHILIP. Brigstock, if I wished to give any one the sack, I should not be taking the trouble to discuss this with you all in—I hope—a reasonable way.

MRS. BRIGSTOCK, *much resenting reasonableness, stands up now to give battle.*

MRS. BRIGSTOCK. Oh, give him the sack, if you please, Mr. Madras. It's time he had it for his own sake.

MR. BRIGSTOCK. No, Freda!

MRS. BRIGSTOCK. You've got your way to make in the world, haven't you? He's got to start on his own like other people, hasn't he?

MR. BRIGSTOCK. [*Feeling safety and his situation slipping.*] In time, Freda.

MRS. BRIGSTOCK. Now's the time. If you're not sick of the life you lead . . . seeing me once a week for an hour or two . . . then I am. And this libel and slander makes about the last straw, I should think.

PHILIP. How long have you been married, Mrs. Brigstock?

MRS. BRIGSTOCK. Four years.

PHILIP. Four years!

MRS. BRIGSTOCK. [*A little quelled by his equable courtesy.*] Four years!

PHILIP. [*In amazed impatience.*] My dear Brigstock, why not have come to the firm and told them? It could have been arranged for you to live out with your wife.

MR. BRIGSTOCK. Well, I have been thinking of it lately, sir, but I never seem to happen on a really likely moment. I'm afraid I'm not a favourite in my department.

MRS. BRIGSTOCK. No fault of his!

MR. BRIGSTOCK. And it's sometimes a very little thing makes the difference between a feller's going and staying . . . when all those that aren't wanted are cleared out after sale time, I mean, for instance. And, of course, the thirty pound a year they allow you to live out on does not keep you . . . it's no use my saying it does. And when you're married . . .

MRS. BRIGSTOCK. [*Who has gathered her grievances again.*] I agreed to it. I have my profession, too. We've been saving quicker. It's three hundred pounds now, all but a bit . . . that's enough to start on. I've got my eye on the premises. It's near here, I don't mind telling you. Why shouldn't we do as well as others . . . and ride in our carriages when we're fifty!

MR. BRIGSTOCK. [*Deprecating such great optimism.*] Well, I've asked advice . . .

MRS. BRIGSTOCK. You think too much of advice. If you'd value yourself higher! Give him the sack, if you please, Mr. Madras, and I'll say thank you.

She finishes, and suddenly MISS YATES *takes up this part of the tale quite otherwise.*

MISS YATES. He has asked my advice, and I've told him to stay where he is.

MRS. BRIGSTOCK. [*Her breath leaving her.*] Oh, indeed!

MISS YATES. He's as steady as can be. But his appearance is against him.

MRS. BRIGSTOCK. [*Hardly recovering it.*] Well, I never!

MR. BRIGSTOCK. A feller does think of the future, Marion.

MISS YATES. I wouldn't if I were you. I don't know where we all get to when we're fifty, and I've never met anyone who did. We're not in the shop any longer, most of us, are we? And we're not all in our carriages.

MR. BRIGSTOCK. [*Meekly.*] I suppose it can be done.

MISS YATES. Oh . . . premises near here and three hundred pounds. Perfect foolery, and William ought to know it is. This firm'll undersell you and eat you up and a dozen more like you . . . and the place that's trusted you for your stock will sell up every stick, and there you'll be in the gutter. I advised him to own up to y o u [*she nods at* MRS. BRIGSTOCK] and live out and do the best he could.

MRS. BRIGSTOCK. [*More drenched with the cold water than she'll own.*] I'm much obliged, I'm sure . . . I've my own opinion. . . .

PHILIP. [*Who has been studying her rather anxiously.*] You've no children, Mrs. Brigstock?

MRS. BRIGSTOCK *goes white.*

MRS. BRIGSTOCK. No, I've no children. How can you save when you have children? But if it was his child this hussy was going to have, and I thought God wouldn't

strike him dead on the spot, I'd do it myself, so I would . . . and he knows I would.

MR. BRIGSTOCK. Haven't I taken my oath to you, Freda?

MRS. BRIGSTOCK. How can I tell if he's speaking the truth . . . I ask you how can I tell? I lie awake at night away from him till I could scream with thinking about it. And I do scream as loud as I dare . . . not to wake the house. And if somebody don't open that window, I shall go off.

PHILIP. Open the window, please, Mr. Brigstock.

> PHILIP'S *voice is serious, though he says but a simple thing.* MR. BRIGSTOCK *opens the window as a man may do in a sick room, helpless, a little dazed. Then he turns back to his wife, who is sitting, head tilted against the sharp back of the plush bench, eyes shut, mouth open. Only* MISS YATES *is ready with her bit of practical comfort.*

MISS YATES. Look here, don't you worry. I could have married William if I'd wanted to. That ought to be proof enough.

MR. BRIGSTOCK. There you are, Freda.

MISS YATES. Before he knew you.

MRS. BRIGSTOCK. [*Opening her eyes.*] Did you ask her?

MISS YATES. No, he never asked me . . . but you know what I mean.

> MISS YATES *gives emphasis to this with what one fears must be described as a wink.* MRS. BRIGSTOCK *looks at the acquiescent* BRIGSTOCK *and acknowledges the implication.*

MRS. BRIGSTOCK. Yes, I know. Oh, I don't believe it really.

> *Comforted, she discovers her handkerchief and blows her nose, after which* MISS CHANCELLOR, *who has been sitting all this while still, silent, and scornful, inquires in her politest voice.*

MISS CHANCELLOR. Do you wish me still to remain, Mr. Madras?

PHILIP. One moment.

MISS YATES. Oh, you'll excuse my back, sir. [*And she turns to the table again.*]

PHILIP. I don't think I need detain you any longer, Mr. and Mrs. Brigstock. Your character is now quite clear in the firm's eyes, Brigstock, and I shall see that arrangements are made for you to live out in the future. I apologise to you both for all this unpleasantness.

They have both risen at this, and now BRIGSTOCK *begins, hesitatingly.*

MR. BRIGSTOCK. Well . . . thank you . . . sir . . . and . . .

MRS. BRIGSTOCK. No, William.

MR. BRIGSTOCK. All right, Freda! [*He struggles into his prepared speech.*] We are very much obliged to you, sir, but I do not see how I can remain with the firm unless there has been, with regard to the accusation, some definite retraction.

PHILIP. [*Near the end of his patience.*] My good man, it is retracted.

MRS. BRIGSTOCK. Publicly.

PHILIP. Nonsense, Mrs. Brigstock.

MRS. BRIGSTOCK. [*Quite herself again.*] Is it indeed . . . how would you like it? [*Then becoming self-conscious.*] Well, I beg pardon. I'm sure we're very sorry for Miss Yates, and I wish she were married.

MISS YATES. [*With some gusto.*] So do I!

Suddenly MISS CHANCELLOR *bursts out.*

MISS CHANCELLOR. Then you wicked girl, why didn't you say so before . . . when I wished to be kind to you? And we shouldn't all be talking in this outrageous, indecent way. I never did in all my life. I don't know how I manage to sit here. Didn't I try to be kind to you?

MISS YATES. [*Unconquerable.*] Yes, and you tried to cry over me. No, I don't wish I were married.

MR. BRIGSTOCK. Of course it's not for me to say, Marion, but will the way you're going on now stop the other young ladies tattling?

The tone of the dispute now sharpens rather dangerously.

MRS. BRIGSTOCK. How's Mr. Brigstock to remain in the firm if Miss Chancellor does?

PHILIP. That is my business, Mrs. Brigstock.

MISS CHANCELLOR. What . . . when I saw him kissing her . . . kissing her!

MRS. BRIGSTOCK. William!

PHILIP. That has been explained.

MISS CHANCELLOR. No, Mr. Madras, while I'm housekeeper here I will not countenance loose behaviour. I don't believe one word of these excuses.

PHILIP. This is just obstinacy, Miss Chancellor.

MISS CHANCELLOR. And personally I wish to reiterate every single thing I said.

And now it degenerates into a wrangle.

MRS. BRIGSTOCK. Then the law shall deal with you.

MISS CHANCELLOR. You can dismiss me at once, if you like, Mr. Madras.

MRS. BRIGSTOCK. It's libellous . . . it's slander . . . !

MR. BRIGSTOCK. Oh, Freda, don't!

MRS. BRIGSTOCK. Yes, and she can be put in prison for it.

MISS CHANCELLOR. If Miss Yates and Mr. Brigstock stay with this firm, I go.

MRS. BRIGSTOCK. And she shall be put in prison . . . the cat!

MR. BRIGSTOCK. Don't, Freda!

MRS. BRIGSTOCK. The heartless cat! Do you swear it isn't true, William?

PHILIP. Take your wife away, Brigstock.

> PHILIP'S *sudden vehemence causes* MRS. BRIGSTOCK *to make straight for the edge of her self-control—and over it.*

MRS. BRIGSTOCK. Yes, and he takes himself away . . . leaves the firm, I should think so, and sorry enough you'll be before we've done. I'll see what the law will say to her . . . and they're not a hundred yards off . . . on the better side of the street, too, and a plate glass window as big as yours.

MR. BRIGSTOCK. Do be quiet, Freda!

MRS. BRIGSTOCK. [*In hysterics now.*] Three hundred pounds, and how much did Maple have when he started . . . or Whiteley . . . and damages, what's more . . . And me putting up with the life I've led . . . !

> *They wait till the fit subsides—*PHILIP *with kindly impatience,* BRIGSTOCK *in mute apology—and* MRS. BRIGSTOCK *is a mass of sobs. Then* BRIGSTOCK *edges her towards the door.*

PHILIP. Wait . . . wait . . . wait. You can't go into the passage making that noise.

MR. BRIGSTOCK. Oh, Freda, you don't mean it.

MRS. BRIGSTOCK. [*Relieved and contrite.*] I'm sure I hope I've said nothing unbecoming a lady . . . I didn't mean to.

PHILIP. Not at all . . . it's natural you should be upset.

MRS. BRIGSTOCK. And we're very much obliged for your kind intentions to us . . .

PHILIP. Wait till you're quite calm.

MRS. BRIGSTOCK. Thank you.

> *Then with a final touch of injury, resentment, dignity, she shakes off* BRIGSTOCK'S *timid hold.*

MRS. BRIGSTOCK. You needn't hold me, William.

> WILLIAM *follows her out to forget and make her forget it all as best he can.* PHILIP *comes back to*

his chair, still good-humoured, but not altogether pleased with his own part in the business so far.

PHILIP. I'm afraid you've put yourself in the wrong, Miss Chancellor.

MISS CHANCELLOR. One often does, sir, in doing one's duty. [*Then her voice rises to a sort of swan song.*] Thirty years have I been with the firm . . . only thirty years. I will leave to-morrow.

PHILIP. I hope you recognise it will not be my fault if you have to.

MISS CHANCELLOR. Miss Yates can obviate it. She has only to speak the truth.

PHILIP *now makes another effort to be frank and kindly.*

PHILIP. Miss Chancellor, are we quite appreciating the situation from Miss Yates's point of view? Suppose she were married?

MISS YATES. I'm not married.

PHILIP. But if you told us you were, we should have to believe you.

MISS CHANCELLOR. Why, Mr. Madras?

PHILIP. [*With a smile.*] It would be good manners to believe her. We must believe so much of what we're told in this world.

MISS YATES. [*Who has quite caught on.*] Well, I did mean to stick that up on you . . . if anyone wants to know. I bought a wedding ring, and I had it on when I saw Dr. Willoughby. But when she came in with her long face and her What can I do for you, my poor child? . . . well, I just couldn't . . . I suppose the Devil tempted me, and I told her the truth.

PHILIP. That's as I thought, so far. Miss Yates, have you that wedding ring with you?

MISS YATES. Yes, I have . . . it's not real gold.

PHILIP. Put it on.

MISS YATES, *having fished it out of a petticoat pocket, rather wonderingly does so, and* PHILIP *turns, maliciously humourous, to* MISS CHANCELLOR.

PHILIP. Now where are we, Miss Chancellor?

MISS CHANCELLOR. I think we're mocking at a very sacred thing, Mr. Madras.

MISS YATES. Yes . . . and I won't now.

With a sudden access of emotion she slams the ring upon the table. PHILIP *meditates for a moment on the fact that there are some things in life still inaccessible to his light-hearted logic.*

PHILIP. True . . . true . . . I beg both your pardons. But suppose the affair had not got about, Miss Yates?

MISS YATES. Well . . . I should have had a nice long illness. It'd all depend on whether you wanted me enough to keep my place open.

PHILIP. You are an employee of some value to the firm.

MISS YATES. I reckoned you would. Miss McIntyre'd be pleased to stay on a bit now she's quarrelled with her fiance. Of course if I'd only been behind the counter . . .

MISS CHANCELLOR. [*Who has drawn the longest of breaths at this calculated immodesty.*] This is how she brazened it out to me, Mr. Madras. This is just what she told Mr. Huxtable . . . and you'll pardon my saying he took a very different view of the matter to what you seem to be taking.

MISS YATES. Oh, I've got to go, now I'm found out . . . I'm not arguing about it.

MISS CHANCELLOR. [*Severely.*] Mr. Madras, what sort of notions are you fostering in this wretched girl's mind?

PHILIP. [*Gently enough.*] I was trying for a moment to put myself in her place.

MISS CHANCELLOR. You will excuse me saying, sir, that you are a man . . .

PHILIP. Not at all!

A *poor joke, but* MISS CHANCELLOR *remains unconscious of it.*

MISS CHANCELLOR. Because a woman is independent, and earning her living, she's not to think she can go on as she pleases. If she wishes to have children, Providence has provided a way in the institution of marriage. Miss Yates would have found little difficulty in getting married, I gather.

MISS YATES. Living in here for twelve years!

MISS CHANCELLOR. Have you been a prisoner, Miss Yates? Not to mention that there are two hundred and thirty-five gentlemen employed here.

MISS YATES. Supposing I don't like any of em?

MISS CHANCELLOR. My dear Miss Yates, if you are merely looking for a husband as such . . . well . . . we're all God's creatures, I suppose. Personally, I don't notice much difference in men, anyway.

MISS YATES. Nor did I.

MISS CHANCELLOR. Lack of self-control . . .

MISS YATES. I s it!

MISS CHANCELLOR. . . . And self-respect. That's what the matter is. Are we beasts of the field, I should like to know? I simply do not understand this unladylike attitude towards the facts of life. Is there nothing for a woman to do in the world but to run after men . . . or pretend to run away from them? I am fifty-eight . . . and I have passed, thank God, a busy and a happy and I hope a useful life . . . and I have never thought any more or less of men than I have of any other human beings . . . or any differently.. I look upon spinsterhood as an honourable state, as my Bible teaches me to. Men are different. But some women marry happily and well . . . and all women can't . . . and some can't marry at all. These facts have to be faced, I take it.

PHILIP. We may take it that Miss Yates has been facing them.

MISS CHANCELLOR. Yes, sir, and in what spirit? I have always endeavoured to influence the young ladies under my control towards the virtues of modesty and decorum . . . so that they may regard either state with an indifferent mind. If I can no longer do that, I prefer to resign my charge. I will say before this young person that I regret the story should have got about. But when anyone has committed a fault it seems to me immaterial who knows of it.

PHILIP. [*Reduced to irony.*] Do you really think so?

MISS CHANCELLOR. Do you require me any more now?

PHILIP. I am glad to have had your explanation. We'll have a private talk to-morrow.

MISS CHANCELLOR. Thank you, sir. I think that will be more in order. Good morning.

PHILIP. Good morning.

> MISS CHANCELLOR *has expressed herself to her entire satisfaction, and retires in good order.* MISS YATES, *conscientiously brazen until the enemy has quite disappeared, collapses pathetically. And* PHILIP, *at his ease at last, begins to scold her in a most brotherly manner.*

MISS YATES. I'm sure she's quite right in all she says.

PHILIP. She may not be. But are you the sort of woman to have got yourself into a scrape of this kind, Miss Yates?

MISS YATES. I'm glad you think I'm not, sir.

PHILIP. Then what on earth did you go and do it for?

MISS YATES. I don't know. I didn't mean to.

PHILIP. Why aren't you married?

MISS YATES. That's my business. [*Then, as if making amends for the sudden snap.*] Oh . . . I've thought of

getting married any time these twelve years. But look what happens . . . look at the Brigstocks . . .

PHILIP. No, no, no . . . that's not what I mean. Why aren't you to be married even now?

MISS YATES. I'd rather not say.

MISS YATES *assumes an air of reticence natural enough; but there is something a little peculiar in the manner of it, so* PHILIP *thinks.*

PHILIP. Very well.

MISS YATES. I'd rather not talk about that part of it, sir, with you, if you don't mind. [*Then she bursts out again.*] I took the risk. I knew what I was about. I wanted to have my fling. And it was fun for a bit. That sounds horrid, I know, but it was.

PHILIP *is watching her.*

PHILIP. Miss Yates, I've been standing up for you, haven't I?

MISS YATES. Yes.

PHILIP. That's because I have unconventional opinions. But I don't do unconventional things.

MISS YATES. [*Naïvely.*] Why don't you?

PHILIP. I shouldn't do them well. Now you start on this adventure believing all the other people say, so I'm not happy about you. As man to man, Miss Yates . . . were you in a position to run this risk?

MISS YATES *honestly thinks before she speaks.*

MISS YATES. Yes . . . I shall be getting a hundred and forty a year living out. I've planned it all. [*She grows happily confidential.*] There's a maisonette at Raynes Park, and I can get a cheap girl to look after it and to take care of . . . I shall call him my nephew, like the Popes of Rome used to . . . or why can't I be a widow? I can bring him up and do him well on it. Insurance'll be a bit stiff in case anything happens to me. But I've got

nearly two hundred saved in the bank to see me through till next summer.

PHILIP. Where are you going when you leave here? What relations have you?

MISS YATES. I have an aunt. I hate her.

PHILIP. Where are you going for the winter?

MISS YATES. Evercreech.

PHILIP. Where's that?

MISS YATES. I don't know. You get to it from Waterloo. I found it in the A. B. C.

PHILIP. [*In protest.*] But my dear girl . . . !

MISS YATES. Well, I want a place where nobody knows me, so I'd better go to one which I don't know, hadn't I? I always make friends. I'm not afraid of people. And I've never been in the country in the winter. I want to see what it's like.

PHILIP *surrenders, on this point beaten; but takes up another more seriously.*

PHILIP. Well . . . granted that you don't want a husband . . . it's your obvious duty to make the man help you support his child.

MISS YATES *is ready for it; serious, too.*

MISS YATES. I daresay. But I won't. I've known other girls in this sort of mess—one or two . . . with everybody being kind to them and sneering at them. And there they sat and cried, and were ashamed of themselves! What's the good of that? And the fellows hating them. Well, I don't want him to hate me. He can forget all about it if he likes . . . and of course he will. I started by crying my eyes out. Then I thought that if I couldn't buck up and anyway pretend to be pleased and jolly well proud, I might as well die. And d'you know when I'd been pretending a bit I found that I really was pleased and proud . . . And I am really proud and happy about it now, sir

. . . I am not pretending. I daresay I've done wrong . . . perhaps I ought to come to grief altogether, but——

At this moment a telephone in the table rings violently, and MISS YATES *apologises—to it, apparently.*

MISS YATES. Oh, I beg pardon.

PHILIP. Excuse me. [*Then answering.*] Yes. Who? No, no, no . . . State. Mr. State. Put him through. [*He is evidently put through.*] Morning! Who? My father . . . not yet. Yes, from Marienbad.

MISS YATES *gets up, apparently to withdraw tactfully, but looking a little startled, too.*

MISS YATES. Shall I . . .

PHILIP. No, no; it's all right.

BELHAVEN *knocks, comes in, and stands waiting by* PHILIP, *who telephones on.*

PHILIP. Yes? Well? . . . Who . . . Mark who? . . . Aurelius. No. I've not been reading him lately . . . Certainly I will . . . Thomas is here doing figures . . . d'you want him . . . I'll put you through. . . . No, wait. I'll call him here, if it's not private. [*Then calling out.*] Tommy!

BELHAVEN. Major Thomas is in the counting house, sir.

PHILIP. Oh. [*Then through the telephone.*] If you'll hold the line I can get him in a minute. Say Mr. State's on the telephone for him, Belhaven.

BELHAVEN. Yes, sir . . . and Mrs. Madras is below in a taxicab, sir, and would like to speak to you. Shall she come up, or, if you're too busy to be interrupted, will you come down to her?

PHILIP. My mother?

BELHAVEN. No, not Mrs. Madras . . . your Mrs. Madras, sir.

PHILIP. Bring her up. And tell Major Thomas.

BELHAVEN. Yes, sir.

BELHAVEN *achieves a greased departure, and* PHILIP *turns back to* MISS YATES.

PHILIP. Where were we?

MISS YATES. [*Inconsequently.*] It is hot in here, isn't it?

PHILIP. The window's open.

MISS YATES. Shall I shut it?

She turns and goes up to the window; one would say to run away from him. PHILIP *watches her steadily.*

PHILIP. What's the matter, Miss Yates?

She comes back more collectedly.

MISS YATES. Oh, I'm sure Miss Chancellor can't expect me to marry one like that now . . . can she?

PHILIP. Marry who?

MISS YATES. Not that I say anything against Mr. Belhaven . . . a very nice young man. And, indeed, I rather think he did try to propose last Christmas. The fact is, y'know, it's only the very young men that ever do ask you to marry them here. When they get older they seem to lose heart . . . or they think it'll cost too much . . . or . . . but anyway, I'm sure it's not important . . .

This very out-of-place chatter dies away under PHILIP'S *sternly enquiring gaze.*

PHILIP. There's one more thing I'm afraid I ought to ask you. This trouble hasn't come about in any way by our sending you up to Bond Street, has it?

MISS YATES. [*Diving into many words again.*] Oh, of course it was most kind of you to send me to Bond Street to get a polish on one's manners . . . but I tell you . . . I couldn't have stood it for long. Those ladies that you get coming in there . . . well, it does just break your nerve. What with following them about, and the things they say you've got to hear, and the things they'll say . . . about you half the time . . . that you've got not to hear . . .

and keep your voice low and sweet, and let your arms hang down straight. You may work more hours in this place, and I daresay it's commoner, but the customers are friendly with you.

PHILIP. . . . Because, you see, Mr. Huxtable and I would feel a little more responsible if it was anyone connected with us who . . .

MISS YATES. [*Quite desperately.*] No, you needn't . . . indeed you needn't . . . I will say there's something in that other place that does set your mind going about men. What he saw in me I never could think . . . honestly, I couldn't, though I think a good deal of myself, I can assure you. But it was my own fault, and so's all the rest of it going to be . . my very own . . .

> MAJOR THOMAS'S *arrival is to* MISS YATES *a very welcome interruption, as she seems, perhaps by the hypnotism of* PHILIP'S *steady look, to be getting nearer and nearer to saying just what she means not to. He comes in at a good speed, glancing back along the passage, and saying . . .*

THOMAS. Here's Jessica.

PHILIP. State on the telephone.

THOMAS. Thank you.

> *And he makes for it as* JESSICA *comes to the open door.* PHILIP'S *wife is an epitome of all that æsthetic culture can do for a woman. More: She is the result—not of thirty-three years—but of three or four generations of cumulative refinement. She might be a race horse! Come to think of it, it is a very wonderful thing to have raised this crop of ladyhood. Creatures, dainty in mind and body, gentle in thought and word, charming, delicate, sensitive, graceful, chaste, credulous of all good, shaming the world's ugliness and strife by the very ease and delightsomeness of their existence; fastidious—fas-*

tidious—fastidious; also in these latter years with their attractions more generally salted by the addition of learning and humour. Is not the perfect lady perhaps the most wonderful achievement of civilisation, and worth the cost of her breeding, worth the toil and the helotage of—all the others? JESSICA MADRAS *is even something more than a lady, for she is conscious of her ladyhood. She values her virtue and her charm: she is proud of her culture, and fosters it. It is her weapon; it justifies her. As she floats now into the ugly room, exquisite from her eyelashes to her shoes, it is a great relief—just the sight of her.*

JESSICA. Am I interrupting?

PHILIP. No, come in, my dear.

THOMAS. [*Into the telephone.*] Hullo!

PHILIP. Well, Miss Yates, I want to see, if I can, that you are not more unfairly treated than people with the courage of their opinions always are.

THOMAS. Hullo!

PHILIP. Oh, you don't know my wife. Jessica, this is Miss Yates, who is in our costume room. You're not actually working in your department now, I suppose?

MISS YATES. [*As defiant of all scandal.*] I am.

THOMAS. [*Still to the unresponsive telephone.*] Hullo! Hullo!

PHILIP. [*Finding* MISS YATES *beyond—possibly above him.*] Very well. That'll do now.

But MISS YATES, *by the presence of* JESSICA, *is now brought to her best costume department manner. She can assume at will, it seems, a new face, a new voice; can become, indeed, a black-silk being of another species.*

MISS YATES. Thank you, sir. I'm sure I hope I've not talked too much. I always was a chatterbox, madam.

PHILIP. You had some important things to say, Miss Yates.

MISS YATES. Not at all, sir. Good morning, madam.

JESSICA. Good morning.

And there is an end of MISS YATES. *Meanwhile, the telephone is reducing* THOMAS *to impotent fury.*

THOMAS. They've cut him off.

While he turns the handle fit to break it, JESSICA *produces an opened telegram, which she hands to* PHILIP.

JESSICA. This . . . just after you left.

PHILIP. My dear, coming all this way with it! Why didn't you telephone?

THOMAS. [*Hearing something at last.*] Hullo . . . is that Mr. State's office? No! Well . . . Counting house, are you still through to it?

JESSICA *is watching, with an amused smile.*

JESSICA. I hate the telephone, especially the one here. Hark at you, Tommy, poor wretch! They put you through from office to office . . . six different clerks . . . all stupid, and all with hideous voices.

PHILIP *has now read his telegram, and is making a face.*

PHILIP. Well, I suppose she must come, if she wants to.

JESSICA. What'll your father say?

PHILIP. My dear girl . . . she has a right to see him if she insists . . . it's very foolish. Here, Tommy! [*He ousts him from the telephone and deals expertly with it.*] I want a telegram sent. Get double three double O Central, and plug through to my room . . . not here . . . my room.

THOMAS. [*Fervently.*] Thank yer.

JESSICA. Got over your anger at the play last night?

THOMAS. Oh, sort of play you must expect if you go to the theatre on a Sunday. Scuse me.

Having admiringly sized up JESSICA *and her costume, he bolts.* PHILIP *sits down to compose his telegram in reply.* JESSICA, *discovering that there is nothing attractive to sit on, hovers.*

PHILIP. Can you put her up for the night?

JESSICA. Yes.

PHILIP. Shall I ask her to dinner?

JESSICA. She'll cry into the soup . . . but I suppose it doesn't matter.

PHILIP. Dinner at eight?

JESSICA. I sound inhospitable.

PHILIP. Well, I've only said we shall be delighted.

JESSICA. But your mother dislikes me so. It's difficult to see much of her.

PHILIP. You haven't much patience with her, have you, Jessica?

JESSICA. Have you?

PHILIP. [*Whimsically.*] I've known her longer than you have.

JESSICA. [*With the nicest humour.*] I only wish she wouldn't write Mildred silly letters about God.

PHILIP. A grandmother's privilege.

JESSICA. The child sends me on another one this morning . . . did I tell you?

PHILIP. No.

JESSICA. Miss Gresham writes, too. She puts it quite nicely. But it's an awful thing for a school to get religion into it.

BELHAVEN *slides in.*

BELHAVEN. Yessir.

PHILIP. Send this at once, please.

BELHAVEN. Yessir.

BELHAVEN *slides out. Then* PHILIP *starts attending to the little pile of letters he brought in with him.* JESSICA, *neglected, hovers more widely.*

JESSICA. Will you come out to lunch, Phil?

PHILIP. Lord! is it lunch time?

JESSICA. It will be soon. I'm lunching with Margaret Inman and Walter Muirhead at the Dieudonné.

PHILIP. Then you won't be lonely.

JESSICA. [*Mischievous.*] Margaret may be if you don't come.

PHILIP. I can't, Jessica. I'm not nearly through.

She comes to rest by his table, and starts to play with the things on it, finding at last a blotting roller that gives satisfaction.

JESSICA. Phil, you might come out with me a little more than you do.

PHILIP. [*Humorously final.*] My dear, not at lunch time.

JESSICA. Ugly little woman you'd been scolding when I came in.

PHILIP. I didn't think so.

JESSICA. Are ugly women as attractive as ugly men?

PHILIP. D'you know . . . I don't find that women attract me.

JESSICA. What a husband!

PHILIP. D'you want them to?

JESSICA. Yes . . . in theory.

PHILIP. Why, Jessica?

JESSICA. [*With charming finesse.*] For my own sake. Last day of Walter's pictures. He has sold all but about five . . . and there's one I wish you'd buy.

PHILIP. Can't afford it.

JESSICA. I suppose, Phil, you're not altogether sorry you married me?

Although PHILIP *is used enough to her charming and reasoned inconsequence, he really jumps.*

PHILIP. Good heavens, Jessica! Well, we've got through eleven years, haven't we?

JESSICA *puts her head on one side and is quite half serious.*

JESSICA. Are you in the least glad you married me?

PHILIP. My dear . . . I don't think about it. Jessica, I cannot keep up this game of repartee.

She floats away at once, half seriously snubbed and hurt.

JESSICA. I'm sorry. I know I'm interrupting.

PHILIP. [*Remorseful at once, for she is so pretty.*] No, no! I didn't mean that. These aren't important.

But he goes on with his letters, and JESSICA *stands looking at him, her face hardening a little.*

JESSICA. But there are times when I get tired of waiting for you to finish your letters.

PHILIP. I know . . . I never quite finish my letters now-a-days. You've got a fit of the idle-fidgets this morning . . . that's what brings you after me. Shall we hire a motor car for the week-end?

THOMAS *bundles into the tête-à-tête, saying as he comes . . .*

THOMAS. He'll make you an offer for the place here, Phil.

PHILIP. Good!

JESSICA *stands there, looking her prettiest.*

JESSICA. Tommy, come out and lunch . . . Phil won't.

THOMAS. I'm afraid I can't.

JESSICA. I've got to meet Maggie Inman and young Muirhead. He'll flirt with her all the time. If there isn't a fourth I shall be fearfully in the cold.

PHILIP. [*Overcome by such tergiversation.*] Oh, Jessica!

THOMAS *is nervous, apparently; at least he is neither ready nor gallant.*

THOMAS. Yes, of course you will. But I'm afraid I can't.

JESSICA. [*In cheerful despair.*] Well, I won't drive to Peckham again of a morning. Wednesday, then, will you call for me?

THOMAS. Wednesday?

JESSICA. Symphony Concert.

THOMAS. [*With sudden seriousness.*] D'you know, I'm afraid I can't on Wednesday, either.

JESSICA. Why not?

THOMAS. [*Though the pretence withers before a certain sharpness in her question.*] Well . . . I'm afraid I can't.

It is evident that JESSICA *has a temper bred to a point of control which makes it nastier, perhaps. She now becomes very cold, very civil, very swift.*

JESSICA. We settled it only last night. What's the time?

PHILIP. Five to one.

JESSICA. I must go. I shall be late.

THOMAS. [*With great concern.*] Have you got a cab?

JESSICA. I think so.

THOMAS. We might do the next, perhaps.

JESSICA. All right, Tommy . . . don't be conscience-stricken. But when you change your mind about going out with me it's pleasanter if you'll find some excuse. Good-bye, you two.

And she is gone; PHILIP *calling after her——*

PHILIP. I shall be in by seven, my dear.

THOMAS *looks a little relieved, and then considerably worried; in fact, he frowns portentously.* PHILIP *disposes of his last letter.*

PHILIP. We've so organised the world's work as to make companionship between men and women a very artificial thing.

THOMAS. [*Without interest.*] Have we?

PHILIP. I think so. What have we got to settle before this afternoon?

THOMAS. Nothing much. [*Then seeming to make up his mind to something.*] But I want three minutes' talk with you, old man.

PHILIP. Oh!

And he gets up and stretches.

THOMAS. D'you mind if I say something caddish?

PHILIP. No.

THOMAS. Put your foot down and don't have me asked to your house quite so much.

PHILIP *looks at him for half a puzzled minute.*

PHILIP. Why not?

THOMAS. I'm seeing too much of your wife.

He is so intensely solemn about it that PHILIP *can hardly even pretend to be shocked.*

PHILIP. My dear Tommy!

THOMAS. I don't mean one single word more than I say.

PHILIP. [*Good-naturedly.*] Tommy, you always have flirted with Jessica.

THOMAS. I don't want you to think that I'm the least bit in love with her.

PHILIP. Naturally not . . . you've got a wife of your own.

THOMAS. [*In intense brotherly agreement.*] Right. That's good horse sense.

PHILIP. And though, as her husband, I'm naturally obtuse in the matter . . . I really don't think that Jessica is in love with you.

THOMAS. [*Most generously.*] Not for a single minute.

PHILIP. Then what's the worry, you silly old ass?

THOMAS *starts to explain, a little tortuously.*

THOMAS. Well, Phil, this is such a damned subtle world. I don't pretend to understand it, but in my old age I have

got a sort of rule of thumb experience to go by . . . which, mark you, I've paid for.

PHILIP. Well?

THOMAS. Phil, I don't like women, and I never did . . . but I'm hardly exaggerating when I say I married simply to get out of the habit of finding myself once every six months in such a position with one of them that I was supposed to be making love to her.

PHILIP *is enjoying himself.*

PHILIP. What do they see in you, Tommy?

THOMAS. God knows, old man . . . I don't. And the time it took up! Of course I was as much in love with Mary as you like, or I couldn't have asked her to marry me. And I wouldn't be without her and the children now for all I ever saw. But I don't believe I'd have gone out of my way to get them if I hadn't been driven to it, old man, . . . driven to it. I'm not going to start the old game again now. [*And he wags his head wisely.*]

PHILIP. What's the accusation against Jessica? Let's have it in so many words.

THOMAS *gathers himself up to launch the vindicating compliment effectively.*

THOMAS. She's a very accomplished and a very charming and a very sweet-natured woman. I consider she's an ornament to society.

PHILIP. [*With equal fervour.*] You're quite right, Tommy, . . . what are we to do with them?

THOMAS. [*It's his favourite phrase.*] What d'you mean?

PHILIP. Well . . . what's your trouble with her?

THOMAS. [*Tortuously still.*] There ain't any yet . . . but . . . well . . . I've been dreading for the last three weeks that Jessica would begin to talk to me about you. That's why I'm talking to you about her. [*Then, with a certain enjoyment of his shocking looseness of behaviour.*] I am a cad!

PHILIP. [*Still amused—but now rather sub-acidly.*] My standing for the County Council must be a most dangerous topic.

THOMAS. But that's just how it begins. Then there's hints . . . quite nice ones . . . about how you get on with each other. Last night in the cab she was talking about when she was a girl . . .

PHILIP. I walked home. Tactful husband!

THOMAS. Phil . . . don't you be French.

PHILIP, *suddenly serious, turns to him.*

PHILIP. But, Tommy, do you imagine that she is unhappy with me?

THOMAS. No, I don't. But she thinks a lot . . . when she's bored with calling on people, and her music and her pictures. And once you begin putting your feelings into words . . . why, they grow.

PHILIP. But if she were, I'd rather that she did confide in you.

THOMAS *shakes his head vehemently.*

THOMAS. No.

PHILIP. Why shouldn't she? You're friends.

THOMAS. Yes . . . there's no reason . . . but I tell you it always begins that way.

PHILIP. You silly ass . . . can't you let a woman talk seriously to you without making love to her?

THOMAS. Damn it, that's what they say . . . but it never made any difference.

PHILIP. Tommy, you're a perfect child!

THOMAS. I remember when I was twenty-four . . . there was one woman . . . years older than me . . . had a grown-up son. She took to scolding me for wasting my time flirting. Told me she'd done it herself once . . . then told me why she'd done it. I kept off kissing her for six weeks, and I'll swear she never wanted me to kiss her. But I did.

PHILIP. Did she box your ears?

THOMAS. No . . . she said she couldn't take me seriously. Well . . . if I'd gone away that would have been priggish. And if I'd stayed I'd have done it again.

PHILIP. [*Mischievously.*] Which did you do?

THOMAS. Oh . . . never you mind.

PHILIP. [*With the utmost geniality.*] Well . . . you have my permission to kiss Jessica, if you think she wants you to.

THOMAS. Thanks, old man . . . that's very clever and up to date, and all the rest of it . . . but I asked you to chuck me out of the house to some extent.

PHILIP. I'm not going to.

THOMAS. Then you're no friend of mine.

PHILIP. Let us put it quite brutally. If Jessica chooses to be unfaithful to me how am I to stop her . . . even if I've the right to stop her?

THOMAS. If you're not prepared to behave like a decent married man you've no right to be married . . . you're a danger.

PHILIP. Also, Tommy, if you caught me making love to your wife you might talk to me . . . but you wouldn't talk to her about it.

THOMAS. [*With a touch of sentiment.*] Mary's different. [*Then protesting again.*] And I'm not making love to your wife. I told you so.

PHILIP. Then if she's making love to you, run away for yourself.

THOMAS. She isn't making love to me. But if you can't take a hint——

PHILIP. A hint! Well . . . I'm dashed!

THOMAS. Well, old man, I give you fair warning of the sort of fool I am . . . and I'll take no more responsibility in the matter.

PHILIP. [*In comic desperation.*] Don't warn me . . .

warn Jessica. Tell her you're afraid of making a fool of yourself with her . . .

THOMAS. [*His eyebrows up.*] But that'd be as good as doing it. Good Lord, you can't behave towards women as if they were men!

PHILIP. Why not?

THOMAS. You try it.

PHILIP. I always do.

THOMAS. No wonder she wants to grumble about you to me.

PHILIP *takes him seriously again.*

PHILIP. Look here, Tommy, I know Jessica pretty well. She doesn't want to be made love to.

THOMAS. [*Positively and finally.*] Yes, she does. [*Then with real chivalry.*] I don't mean that unpleasantly . . . but all women do. Some of em want to be kissed and some want you to talk politics . . . but the principle's the same.

PHILIP. [*Finely contemptuous.*] What a world you live in!

THOMAS. . . . And the difficulty with me is that if I try to talk politics I find they don't know enough about it . . . or else that they know too much about it . . . and it's simpler to kiss em and have done.

PHILIP. Oh, much s i m p l e r!

THOMAS. [*Back to his starting point—pathetic.*] But I'm married now, and I want a quiet life . . .

A knock at the door interrupts him.

PHILIP. Come in.

It is BELHAVEN.

BELHAVEN. Will you lunch, sir?

PHILIP. What is there?

BELHAVEN. I'm afraid only the Usual, sir.

PHILIP. Can you manage the Usual, Tommy? What is it, Belhaven?

BELHAVEN. Boiled mutton and a jam pudding, I think, sir. [*Then as confessing to a vulgarity.*] Roly-poly.

THOMAS. [*With great approval.*] Right. I hope it's strawberry jam.

PHILIP. Sure to be. Put it in Mr. Huxtable's room, will you . . . that's airy.

BELHAVEN. Yessir.

BELHAVEN *vanishes.*

THOMAS. [*As on reflection.*] Not plum, y'know . . . plum's no use.

PHILIP *gathers up his papers.*

PHILIP. I'll give the wicked woman your message.

THOMAS *takes alarm. He hadn't thought of this.*

THOMAS. No . . . do it off your own bat. She won't mind, then.

PHILIP. Tommy, I cannot assume the turban of the Turk. My sense of humour and my sense of decency towards women won't let me.

THOMAS. [*Frowning.*] I believe I'd better not have told you.

PHILIP. [*Unsympathetic.*] Why not? Next to telling her, the most commonsense thing to do.

THOMAS. She won't think so.

PHILIP. She'll have to.

There is something so like cruelty in these three words that THOMAS *stares at him. Then he says, reflectively.*

THOMAS. Phil, d'you ever thank God you're not a woman?

PHILIP. No.

THOMAS. When I think what most of em have to choose between is soft-hearted idiots like me and hard-headed devils like you . . . I wonder they put up with us as they do.

PHILIP *stares at him in turn with a queer smile. Then, as he turns to go . . .*

PHILIP. You've made it again, Tommy.

THOMAS. What?

PHILIP. Your one sensible remark. Come along.

And he is gone. THOMAS *follows, protesting.*

THOMAS. Look here . . . what d'you mean by One Sensible Remark? It's like your infernal . . .

He pulls the door to after him. The room is alone with its ugliness.

ACT III

In 1884 the Madras House was moved to its present premises in Bond Street. In those days decoration was mostly a matter of paint and wall-paper, but MR. CONSTANTINE MADRAS, *ever daring, proceeded to beautify the home of his professional triumphs. He could neither draw nor colour, but he designed and saw to it all himself, and being a man of great force of character, produced something which, though extraordinarily wrong, was yet, since it was sincere, in a way effective. It added to his reputation and to the attractiveness of the Madras House.*

In twenty-six years there have been changes, but one room remains untouched from then till now. This is the rotunda, a large, lofty, skylighted place, done in the Moorish style. The walls are black marble to the height of a man, and from there to the ceiling the darkest red. The ceiling is of a cerulean blue, and in the middle of the skylight a golden sun, with spiked rays proceeding from its pleasant human countenance, takes credit for some of the light it intercepts. An archway with fretted top leads from the rest of the establishment. Another has behind it a platform, a few steps high, hung with black velvet. The necessary fireplace (were there hot-water pipes in 1884?) is disguised by a heavy multi-coloured canopy, whose fellow hangs over a small door opposite. On the floor is a Persian carpet of

some real beauty. On the walls are gas brackets (1884 again!) the oriental touch achieved in their crescent shape. Round the wall are divans, many cushioned; in front of them little coffee-stools. It is all about as Moorish as Baker Street Station, but the general effect is humorous, pleasant, and even not undignified.

In the old, grand days of the Madras House the rotunda was the happy preserve of very special customers, those on whom the great man himself would keep an eye. If you had been there you spoke of it casually; indeed, to be free of the rotunda was to be a well-dressed woman and recognised by all society as such. Ichabod! Since MR. CONSTANTINE MADRAS *retired, the Madras House is on the way to becoming almost like any other shop; the special customers are nobody in particular, and the rotunda is where a degenerate management meet to consider the choice of ready-made models from Paris. A large oval table had to be imported and half a dozen Moorish chairs. It seemed, to the surprise of the gentleman who went innocently ordering such things, that there were only that number in existence. Scene of its former glories, this is now to be the scene, perhaps, of the passing of the Madras House into alien hands.*

Three o'clock on the Monday afternoon is when the deal is to be put through, if possible, and it is now five minutes to. MAJOR THOMAS *is there, sitting at the table; papers spread before him, racking his brains at a few final figures.* PHILIP *is there, in rather a school-boyish mood. He is sitting on the table, swinging his legs.* MR. HUXTABLE *is there, too, dressed in his best, important and nervous, and he is talking to* MR. EUSTACE PERRIN STATE.

MR. STATE *is an American, and if American magazine literature is anything to go by, no American is altogether unlike him. He has a rugged, blood and iron sort of face, utterly belied by his soft, smiling eyes; rightly belied, too, for he has made his thirty or forty millions in the gentlest way—as far as he knows. You would not think of him as a money-maker. As a matter of fact, he has no love of money, and little use for it, for his tastes are simple. But money-making is the honourable career in his own country, and he has the instinct for turning money over and the knack of doing so on a big scale. His shock of grey hair makes him look older than he probably is; his voice is almost childlike in its sweetness. He has the dignity and aptitude for command that power can give.*

From the little canopied dome comes MR. WINDLESHAM, *present manager of the establishment. He is a tailor-made man; and the tailor only left off for the wax modeller and wigmaker to begin. For his clothes are too perfect to be worn by anything but a dummy, and his hair and complexion are far from human. Not that he dyes or paints them; no, they were made like that. His voice is a little inhuman, too, and as he prefers the French language, with which he has a most unripe acquaintance, to his own, and so speaks English as much like French as his French is like English, his conversation seems as unreal as the rest of him. Impossible to think of him in any of the ordinary relations of life. He is a functionary. Nature, the great inventor, will evolve, however roughly, what is necessary for her uses. Millinery has evolved the man-milliner. As he comes in—and he has the gait of a water-wagtail* —MR. HUXTABLE *is making conversation.*

MR. HUXTABLE. A perfect barometer, as you might say —when your eye gets used to it.

WINDLESHAM. [*To* PHILIP, *and with a wag of his head back to the other room.*] They're just ready.

MR. STATE. [*Smiling benevolently at* MR. HUXTABLE.] Is it really? The Crystal Palace! But what a sound that has!

MR. HUXTABLE. [*With modest pride.*] And a very ealthy locality!

PHILIP. Come along and meet State. [*He jumps off the table, capturing* WINDLESHAM'S *arm.*]

MR. STATE. [*Enthusiastic.*] Denmark Hill. Compliment to Queen Alexandra!

MR. HUXTABLE. [*Struck by the information.*] Was it, now?

MR. STATE. Herne Hill . . . Herne the Hunter! That's the charm of London to an American. Association. Every spot speaks.

PHILIP. [*As he joins them.*] This is Mr. Windlesham . . . our manager. He's going to show us some new models.

MR. STATE *impressively extends a hand and repeats the name.*

MR. STATE. Mr. Windlesham.

WINDLESHAM. Most happy. I thought you'd like to see the very latest . . . brought them from Paris only yesterday.

MR. STATE. Most opportune! [*Then with a sweeping gesture.*] Mr. Philip, this room inspires me. Your father's design?

PHILIP. Yes.

MR. STATE. I thought so.

PHILIP. That used to be his private office.

MR. STATE. [*Reverently.*] Indeed! Where the Duchess went on her knees! An historic spot. Interesting to me!

PHILIP. Something of a legend that.

MR. STATE, *intensely solemn, seems now to ascend the pulpit of some philosophic conventicle.*

MR. STATE. I believe in legends, sir . . . they are the spiritual side of facts. They go to form tradition. And it is not given to man to found his institutions in security of mind except upon tradition. That is why our eyes turn eastward to you from America, Mr. Huxtable.

MR. HUXTABLE. [*In some awe.*] Do they, now?

MR. STATE. Has it never struck you that while the progress of man has been in the path of the sun, his thoughts continually go back to the place of its rising? I have at times found it a very illuminating idea.

PHILIP. [*Not indecently commonplace.*] Well, have them in now, Windlesham, while we're waiting.

WINDLESHAM. You might cast your eyes over these new girls, Mr. Philip . . . the very best I could find, I do assure you. Faces are hard enough to get, but figures . . . Well, there! [*Reaching the little door, he calls through.*] Allons Mes'moiselles! Non . . . non . . . par l'autre porte et à la gauche. [*Then back again.*] You get the best effect through a big doorway. [*He further explains this by sketching one in the air.*] One, two and four first.

He exhibits some costume drawings he has been carrying, distributes one or two, and then vanishes into the other room, from which his voice vibrates.

WINDLESHAM. En avant s'il vous plait. Numero un! Eh bien . . . numero trois. Non Ma'moiselle, ce n'est pas commode . . . regardez ce corsage la . . .

MR. HUXTABLE. [*Making a face.*] What I'm always thinking is, why not have a manly chap in charge of the place up here.

MR. STATE. [*With perfect justice.*] Mr. Windlesham

may be said to strike a note. Whether it is a right note . . . ?

Through the big doorway WINDLESHAM *ushers in a costume from Paris, the very last word in discreet and costly finery, delicate in colour, fragile in texture; a creation. This is hung upon a young lady of pleasing appearance, pre-occupied with its exhibition, which she achieves by slow and sinuous, never-ceasing movements. She glides into the room. She wears a smile also.*

WINDLESHAM. One and two are both Larguillière, Mr. Philip. He can't get in the Soupçon Anglais, can he? Won't . . . I tell him. Promenez et sortez Ma'moiselle.

The young lady, still smiling and sinuous, begins to circle the room. She seems to be unconscious of its inhabitants, and they, in return, rather dreadfully pretend not to notice her, but only the costume.

WINDLESHAM. Numero Deux.

Another costume, rakishly inclined, with a hat deliberately hideous. The young lady contained in them is again slow and sinuous and vacantly smiling.

WINDLESHAM. But this is chic, isn't it? Promenez.

MR. STATE. [*In grave enquiry.*] What is the Soupçon Anglais?

PHILIP. A Frenchman will tell you that for England you must first make a design and then spoil it.

THOMAS. [*Whose attention has been rivetted.*] Don't they speak English?

WINDLESHAM. Oh, pas un mot . . . I mean, not a word. Only came over with me yesterday . . . these three.

THOMAS. Because this frock's a bit thick, y'know.

WINDLESHAM. Numero Trois!

A third costume, calculated to have an innocent

effect. The accompanying young lady, with a sense of fitness, wears a pout instead of a smile.

PHILIP. What's this? [*His eye is on the surmounting hat of straw.*]

WINDLESHAM. [*With a little crow of delight.*] That's the new hat. La belle Hélène again!

MR. STATE. [*Interested, still grave.*] La belle Hélène. A Parisian firm?

WINDLESHAM. [*Turning this to waggish account.*] Well . . . dear me . . . you can almost call her that, can't you? [*Suddenly he dashes at the costume and brings it to a standstill.*] Oh, mon Dieu, Ma'moiselle! La gorgette . . . vous l'avez derangé.

He proceeds to arrange la gorgette to his satisfaction, also some other matters which seem to involve a partial evisceration of the underclothing. The young lady, passive, pouts perseveringly. He is quite unconscious of her separate existence. But THOMAS *is considerably shocked, and whispers violently to* PHILIP.

THOMAS. I say, he shouldn't pull her about like that.

WINDLESHAM. [*Skipping back to admire the result.*] Là . . . comme ça.

The costume continues its round; the others are still circling, veering and tacking, while WINDLESHAM *trips admiringly around and about them. It all looks like some dance of modish dervishes.*

PHILIP. [*Heartlessly.*] La belle Hélène, Mr. State, is a well-known Parisian cocotte . . . who sets many of the fashions which our wives and daughters afterwards assume.

MR. HUXTABLE. [*Scandalised.*] Don't say that, Phil; it's not nice.

PHILIP. Why?

MR. HUXTABLE. I'm sure no ladies are aware of it.

PHILIP. But what can be more natural and right than for the professional charmer to set the pace for the amateur!

WINDLESHAM. [*Pausing in the dance.*] Quite la haute cocotterie, of course.

MR. STATE. [*Solemnly.*] Do you infer, Mr. Madras, a difference in degree, but not in kind?

PHILIP. [*Courteously echoing his tone.*] I do.

MR. STATE. That is a very far-reaching observation, sir.

PHILIP. It is.

THOMAS. Do you know the lady personally, Mr. Windlesham?

> WINDLESHAM *turns, with some tag of a costume in his hand, thus unconsciously detaining the occupier.*

WINDLESHAM. Oh, no . . . oh, dear me, no . . . quite the reverse, I do assure you. There's nothing gay in Paris to me. I was blasé long ago.

MR. STATE. But touching that hat, Mr. Windlesham.

WINDLESHAM. Oh, to be sure. Attendez, mademoiselle.

> *Tiptoeing, he dexterously tilts the straw hat from the elaborate head it is perched on.*

WINDLESHAM. It's not a bad story. Sortez.

> *By this two costumes have glided out. The third follows.* STATE, *who has found it hard to keep his eyes off them, gives something of a sigh.*

MR. STATE. If they'd only just smile or wink, I might get over the extraordinary feeling it gives me.

> WINDLESHAM, *caressing the hat, takes up an attitude for his story.*

WINDLESHAM. Well . . . it appears that a while ago, out at the Pré Cathelan . . . there was Hélène, taking her afternoon cup of buttermilk. What should she see but Madame Erlancourt . . . one knows enough about that lady, of course . . . in a hat the very twin of hers . . .

the very twin. Well . . . you can imagine! Someone had blundered.

MR. STATE. [*Absorbed.*] No, I don't follow.

PHILIP. Some spy in the service of that foreign power had procured and parted with the plans of the hat.

MR. STATE. Madame What's-her-name might have seen it on her before, and copied it.

PHILIP. Mr. State, Hélène doesn't wear a hat twice.

MR. STATE. My mistake!

WINDLESHAM. So there was a terrible scene . . .

THOMAS. With madame . . . ?

WINDLESHAM. [*Repudiating any such vulgarity.*] Oh, no. Hélène just let fly at her chaperon, she being at hand, so to speak.

MR. STATE. [*Dazzled.*] Her w h a t! [*Then with humorous awe.*] No, I beg your pardon . . . go on . . . go on.

WINDLESHAM. She took off her own hat . . . pinned it on the head of the ugliest little gamine she could find, and sent the child walking along the grass in it. Then she sent to the kitchens for one of those baskets they bring the fish in . . . [*He twirls the hat.*] . . . you see. Then she ripped a yard of lace off her underskirt and twisted it round. Then she took off both her . . . well . . . La Belle France, you know . . . there is something in the atmosphere! It was her garters she took off . . . blue silk.

MR. STATE. [*Puritan.*] In public?

WINDLESHAM. [*Professional.*] Oh, . . . it can be done. Hooked them together and fastened the bit of lace round the basket this way. Très simple! That's what she wore the rest of the afternoon and back to Paris. This is what's going to be the rage.

Having deftly pantomimed this creation of a fash-

ion, he hands the hat, with an air, to MR. STATE, *who examines it.* PHILIP *is smilingly caustic.*

PHILIP. La belle Hélène has imagination, Mr. State. She is also, I am told, thrifty, inclined to religion, a vegetarian, Vichy water her only beverage; in fact, a credit to her profession and externally . . . to ours.

MR. STATE *hands back the hat, with the solemnest humour.*

MR. STATE. Mr. Windlesham, I am much obliged to you for this illuminating anecdote.

WINDLESHAM. Not at all. . . . Will you see the other three?

MR. STATE. By all means.

WINDLESHAM. They won't be long in changing . . . but there's one I must just pin on.

MR. STATE. No hurry.

He has acquired a new joy in WINDLESHAM, *whom he watches dance away. Then a song is heard from the next room . . .*

WINDLESHAM. Allons . . . numero cinq . . . numero sept . . . numero dix. Ma'moiselle Ollivier . . . vous vous mettrez . . .

And the door closes. PHILIP *looks at his watch.*

PHILIP. But it's ten past three. We'd better not wait for my father.

They surround the table and sit down.

MR. STATE. Major Thomas, have you my memoranda?

THOMAS. Here.

He hands them to STATE, *who clears his throat, refrains from spitting, and begins the customary American oration.*

MR. STATE. The scheme, gentlemen, for which I desire to purchase the Madras House and add it to the interest of the Burrows enterprise, which I already control, is—to put it shortly—this. The Burrows provincial scheme—

you are aware of its purpose—goes well enough as far as the shareholding by the local drapery stores is concerned. It has been interesting to me to discover which aspects of the Burrows scheme suit which cities . . . and why. An absorbing problem in the psychology of local conditions! Now, we have eliminated from the mass a considerable number of cases where the local people will not join with us. And in your Leicesters and Norwiches and Plymouths and Coventrys . . . there the unknown name, the uninspiring name of Burrows, upon a fire-new establishment next door might anyhow be ineffective. But beyond that I have a reason . . . and I hope a not uninteresting reason, to put before you gentlemen . . . why it is in these provincial centres that we should look to establish our Madras Houses . . . New Edition. Is that clear so far?

During this MR. CONSTANTINE MADRAS *has arrived. He turned aside for a moment to the door that the models came from, now he joins the group. A man of sixty, to whom sixty is the prime of life. Tall, quite dramatically dignified, suave, a little remote; he is one of those to whom life is an art of which they have determined to be master. It is a handsome face, Eastern in type, the long beard only streaked with grey. He does not dress like the ruck of men, because he is not of them. The velvet coat, brick-red tie, shepherd's-plaid trousers, white spats and patent boots, both suit him and express him subtly and well—the mixture of sensuous originality and tradition which is the man.* PHILIP *is purposely casual in greeting him; he has sighted him first. But* MR. STATE *gets up, impressed. It is part of his creed to recognise greatness; he insists on recognising it.*

PHILIP. Hullo, Father!

MR. STATE. Mr. Madras! Proud to meet you again.

CONSTANTINE. [*Graciously, without emotion.*] How do you do, Mr. State.

PHILIP. You know everyone, Father. Oh . . . Hippisly Thomas.

CONSTANTINE. [*Just as graciously.*] How do you do, sir. [*Then, with a mischievous smile, he pats* HUXTABLE *on the shoulder.*] How are you, my dear Harry?

> MR. HUXTABLE *had heard him coming, and felt himself turn purple. This was the great meeting after thirty years! He had let it come upon him unawares; purposely let it, for indeed he had not known what to say or do. He had dreaded having the inspiration to say or do anything. Now, alas, and thank goodness! it is too late. He is at a suitable disadvantage. He need only grunt out sulkily . . .*

MR. HUXTABLE. I'm quite well, thank you.

> CONSTANTINE, *with one more pat in pardon for the rudeness, goes to his chair.*

MR. STATE. A pleasant trip on the continent?

CONSTANTINE. Instructive. Don't let me interrupt business. I shall pick up the thread.

MR. STATE. [*Serving up a little re-warmed oration.*] I was just proceeding to place on the table-cloth some preliminary details of the scheme that has been elaborating since our meeting in June last to consolidate your name and fame in some of the most important cities of England. We had not got far.

> *He consults his notes.* CONSTANTINE *produces from a case a slender cigarette holder of amber.*

CONSTANTINE. You've some new models, Phil.

PHILIP. Yes.

CONSTANTINE. The tall girl looks well enough. May I smoke?

MR. STATE. Allow me. [*Whipping out his cigar case.*]

CONSTANTINE. A cigarette, thank you, of my own.

He proceeds to make and light one. MR. STATE *offers cigars generally, and then places one to his own hand.*

MR. STATE. I occasionally derive some pleasure from a cold cigar. I was not for the moment entering upon the finance of the matter because I entertain no doubt that . . . possibly with a little adjustment of the proportion of shares and cash . . . that can be fixed.

MR. HUXTABLE. [*In emulation of all this ease and grace.*] I'll ave a cigarette, Phil . . . if you've got one.

PHILIP *has one. And every one makes himself comfortable, while* MR. STATE *continues enjoyably . . .*

MR. STATE. And I suspect that you are no more interested in money than I am, Mr. Madras. Anyone can make money, if he has capital enough. The little that I have came from lumber and canned peaches. Now, there was poetry in lumber. The virgin forest . . . I'd go sit in it for weeks at a time. There was poetry in peaches . . . before they were canned. Do you wonder why I bought that mantle establishment in the city?

PHILIP. [*Who is only sorry that sometime he must stop.*] Why, Mr. State?

MR. STATE. Because, Mr. Philip, I found myself a lonely man. I felt the need of getting into touch with what Goethe refers to as the woman-spirit . . . drawing us ever upward and on. That opportunity occurred, and it seemed a businesslike way of doing the trick.

CONSTANTINE. [*Through a little cloud of smoke.*] And satisfying?

MR. STATE. I beg your pardon?

CONSTANTINE. Has the ready-made skirt business satisfied your craving for the eternal feminine?

MR. STATE. Mr. Madras . . . that sarcasm is deserved . . No, sir, it has not. The Burrows business, I discover, lacks all inner meaning . . . it has no soul. A business can no more exist without a soul than a human being can. I'm sure I have you with me there, Mr. Huxtable.

Poor MR. HUXTABLE *quite chokes at the suddenness of this summons, but shines his best.*

MR. HUXTABLE. I should say so, quite.

MR. STATE *begins to glow.*

MR. STATE. There was fun, mind you . . . there still is . . . in making these provincial milliners hop . . . putting a pistol to their heads . . . saying Buy our Goods or be Froze Out. That keeps me lively and it wakes them up . . . does them good. But Burrows isn't in the Movement. The Woman's Movement. The Great Modern Woman's Movement. It has come home to me that the man, who has as much to do with Woman as manufacturing the bones of her corsets and yet is not consciously in that Movement is Outside History. Shovelling goods over a counter and adding up profits . . . that's no excuse for cumbering the earth . . . nothing personal, Mr. Huxtable.

MR. HUXTABLE *is ready this time.*

MR. HUXTABLE. No, no . . . I'm listening to you. I'm not too old to learn.

MR. STATE. Mind, I don't say I haven't taken pleasure in Burrows. We've had Notions . . . caused two Ideas to spring where one sprung before. There was Nottingham.

MR. HUXTABLE. I know Nottingham . . . got a shop there?

MR. STATE. [*With wholesome pride.*] In two years the Burrows establishment in Nottingham has smashed competition. I've not visited the city myself. The notion was our local manager's. Simple. The Ladies' department served by gentlemen . . . the Gentlemen's by ladies.

Always, of course, within the bounds of delicacy. Do you think there is nothing in that, Mr. Huxtable?

MR. HUXTABLE. [*Round-eyed and open-mouthed.*] Oh . . . well . . .

MR. STATE. But are you the Mean Sensual Man?

MR. HUXTABLE. [*Whose knowledge of the French language hardly assists him to this startling translation.*] No . . . I hope not.

MR. STATE. Put yourself in his place. Surrounded by pretty girls . . . good girls, mind you . . . high class. Pay them well . . . let them live out . . . pay for their mothers and chaperons, if necessary. Well . . . Surrounded by Gracious Womanhood, does the Sensual Man forget how much money he is spending or does he not? Does he come again? Is it a little Oasis in the desert of his business day? Is it a better attraction than Alcohol, or is it not?

PHILIP. [*Bitingly.*] Is it?

MR. STATE. Then, sir . . . Audi Alteram Partem. I should like you to see our Ladies' Fancy Department at its best . . . just before the football season.

PHILIP. I think I do!

MR. STATE. Athletes everyone of em . . . not a man under six foot . . . bronzed, noble fellows! And no flirting allowed . . . no making eyes . . . no pandering to anything Depraved. Just the Ordinary Courtesies of our Modern Civilisation from Pure, Clean-minded Gentlemen towards any of the Fair Sex who step in to buy a shilling sachet or the like. And pay, sir . . . The women come in flocks!

MR. HUXTABLE. [*Bereft of breath.*] Is this how you mean to run your new Madras Houses?

MR. STATE. Patience, Mr. Huxtable. It's but six months ago that I started to study the Woman Question from the point of view of Burrows and Co. I attended women's

meetings in London, in Manchester, and in one-horse places as well. Now, Political claims were but the narrowest, drabbest aspect of the matter as I saw it. The Woman's Movement is Woman expressing herself. Let us look at things as they are. What are a Woman's chief means . . . how often her only means of expressing herself? Anyway . . . what is the first thing that she spends her money on? Clothes, gentlemen, clothes. Therefore, I say . . . though at Cannon Street we may palp with good ideas . . . the ready-made skirt is out of date . . .

WINDLESHAM, *pins in his mouth, fashion plates under his arm, and the fish-basket hat in his hand, shoots out of the other room.*

WINDLESHAM. Will you have the others in now? [*Then back through the door.*] Allons, Mesmoiselles si vous plait. Numero cinq le premier. [*Then he turns the hat upside down on the table.*] I thought you'd like to see that they've actually left the handles on. But I don't think we can do that here, do you?

There comes in as before the most elaborate evening gown that ever was.

WINDLESHAM. [*As he searches for the design.*] Numero cinq . . . number five.

THOMAS *is much struck.*

THOMAS. I say . . . by Jove!

But the cold, searching light seems to separate from the glittering pink affair the poor, pretty, smiling creature exhibiting it, until, indeed, she seems half naked. MR. WINDLESHAM'S *æsthetic sense is outraged.*

WINDLESHAM. Mais non, mais non . . . pas en plein jour. Mettez vous par là dans le . . . dans l'alcove . . . à côté du velours noir.

The costume undulates towards the black velvet platform. THOMAS *is lost in admiration.*

THOMAS. That gives her a chance, don't it? Damn pretty girl!

PHILIP. [*His eye twinkling.*] She'll understand that, Tommy.

THOMAS. [*In good faith.*] She won't mind.

MR. STATE. [*Who has been studying the undulations.*] How they learn to walk like it . . . that's what beats me!

> MR. WINDLESHAM *turns on the frame of lights which bear upon the velvet platform. The vision of female loveliness is now complete.*

WINDLESHAM. There . . . that's the coup d'oeil.

> *The vision turns this way and that to show what curves of loveliness there may be. They watch, all but* CONSTANTINE, *who has sat silent and indifferent, rolling his second cigarette, which he now smokes serenely. At last* PHILIP'S *voice breaks in, at its coolest, its most ironic.*

PHILIP. And are we to assume, Mr. State, that this piece of self-decoration really expresses the nature of any woman? Rather an awful thought!

THOMAS. [*In protest.*] Why?

PHILIP. Or if it expresses a man's opinion of her . . . that's rather worse.

THOMAS. It's damned smart. Ain't it, Mr. Huxtable?

MR. HUXTABLE. [*Who is examining closely.*] No use to us, of course. We couldn't imitate that under fifteen guineas. Look at the . . . what d'you call it?

WINDLESHAM. [*Loving the very word.*] Diamanté.

THOMAS. [*With discretion.*] Just for England, of course, you might have the shiny stuff marking a bit more definitely where the pink silk ends and she begins.

MR. HUXTABLE. [*Not to be sordid.*] But it's a beautiful thing.

MR. STATE. [*Sweepingly.*] Fitted to adorn the presiding genius of some intellectual and artistic salon. More

artistic than intellectual, perhaps . . . more likely to be the centre of Emotion than Thought!

WINDLESHAM. I could almost tell you who we shall sell that to. Mrs. . . . Mrs. . . . dear me . . . you'd all know the name. Assez, Mamoiselle . . . sortez.

He turns off the light. The vision becomes once more a ridiculously expensive dress, with a rather thin and shivering young person half inside it, who is thus unceremoniously got rid of.

WINDLESHAM. Numero sept.

Another costume.

MR. STATE. Now here again. Green velvet. Is it velvet?

WINDLESHAM. Panne velvet. Promenez, s'il vous plait.

MR. STATE. And ermine.

MR. HUXTABLE. Good Lord . . . more buttons!

MR. STATE. The very thing, no doubt, in which some peeress might take the chair at a drawing-room meeting.

PHILIP. [*As he eyes the buttons and the ermine.*] Either of the Humanitarian or of the Anti-Sweating League. Indeed, no peeress could dream of taking a chair without it.

MR. STATE. [*In gentle reproof.*] Sarcasm, Mr. Philip.

PHILIP. [*Won by such sweetness.*] I really beg your pardon.

WINDLESHAM. Numero dix.

A third costume.

PHILIP. What about this?

MR. STATE. Grey with a touch of pink . . . severely soft. An Anti-suffrage Platform.

PHILIP. [*In tune with him.*] No . . . it's cut square in the neck. Suffrage, I should say.

MR. STATE. [*Rubbing his hands.*] Good! There is purpose in this persiflage, Major Thomas. Woman al-

lures us along many paths. Be it ours to attend her, doing what service we may.

CONSTANTINE. You are a poet, Mr. State.

MR. STATE. I never wrote one in my life, sir.

CONSTANTINE. How many poets should cease scribbling and try to live such perfect epics as seems likely to be this purchase of yours of the Madras House!

MR. STATE. [*Much gratified.*] I shall be proud to be your successor. [*Then he soars.*] But it is the Middle Class Woman of England that is waiting for me. The woman who still sits at the Parlour window of her Provincial Villa, pensively gazing through the Laurel bushes. I have seen her on my Solitary Walks. She must have h e r chance to Dazzle and Conquer. That is every woman's birthright . . . be she a Duchess in Mayfair or a doctor's wife in the suburbs of Leicester. And remember, gentlemen, that the Middle Class Women of England . . . think of them in bulk . . . they form one of the greatest Money Spending Machines the world has ever seen.

MR. HUXTABLE. [*With a wag of the head; he is more at his ease now.*] Yes . . . their husbands' money.

MR. STATE. [*Taking a long breath and a high tone.*] All our most advanced thinkers are agreed that the economic independence of women is the next step in the march of civilisation.

MR. HUXTABLE. [*Overwhelmed.*] Oh . . . I beg pardon.

MR. STATE. [*Soaring now more than ever.*] And now that the Seed of Freedom is sown in their Sweet Natures . . . what Mighty Forest . . . what a Luxuriant, Tropical, Scented growth of Womanhood may not spring up around us. For we live in an Ugly World. Look at my tie! Consider your vest, Major Thomas! [*His eye searches for those costumes, and finds one.*] This is all

the Living Beauty that there is. We want more of it. I want to see that Poor Provincial Lady burst through the laurel bushes and dash down the road . . . Clad in Colours of the Rainbow.

WINDLESHAM *has indeed detained the severely soft costume and its young lady, and there she has stood for a while, still smiling, but wondering, perhaps, behind the smile, into what peculiar company of milliners she has fallen.* THOMAS, *suddenly noticing that she is standing there, with the utmost politeness jumps up to hand his chair.*

THOMAS. I say, though . . . allow me.

WINDLESHAM. Thank you . . . but she can't. Not in that corset.

MR. STATE. Dear me, I had not meant to detain Mademoiselle. [*Then to amend his manners, and rather as if it were an incantation warranted to achieve his purpose.*] Bon jour.

The young lady departs, a real smile quite shaming the unreal.

MR. STATE. You clean forget they're there. We gave some time and money to elaborating a mechanical moving figure to take the place of . . . a real automaton, in fact. But sometimes it stuck and sometimes it ran away . . .

THOMAS. And the cost!

PHILIP. [*Finely.*] Flesh and blood is always cheaper.

MR. STATE. You approve of corsets, Mr. Windlesham?

WINDLESHAM. Oh, yes . . . the figure is the woman, as we say.

MR. STATE. Have you ever gone deeply into the Psychology of the question? A while ago I had a smart young Historian write Burrows a little Monograph on Corsets . . . price cne shilling. Conservative, summing up in their favour. And we made up a little Museum of them . . . at Southampton, I think . . . but that was not

a success. Major Thomas . . . we must send Mr. Windlesham a copy of that Monograph. You will find it very interesting.

WINDLESHAM. I'm sure I shall. Can I do any more for you?

PHILIP. See me before I go, will you?

WINDLESHAM. Then it's au'voir.

And he flutters away. There is a pause as if they had to recollect where they were. It is broken by PHILIP *saying, meditatively.*

PHILIP. I sometimes wonder if we realise what women's clothes are like . . . or our own, for that matter.

MR. HUXTABLE. What's that?

PHILIP. Have you ever tried to describe a costume as it would appear to a strange eye? Can you think of this last? A hat as little like a hat as anything on a creature's head may be. Lace. Flowers of a colour it never pleases God to grow them. And a jewelled feather . . . a feather with stones in it. The rest might be called a conspiracy in three colours on the part of a dozen sewing women to persuade you that the creature they have clothed can neither walk, digest her food, nor bear children. Now . . . can that be beautiful?

MR. STATE. [*To whom this is the real conversational thing.*] Mr. Philip, that notion is a lever thrust beneath the very foundations of Society.

MR. HUXTABLE. [*Showing off a little.*] Oh . . . trying to upset people's ideas for the sake of doing it . . . silly.

THOMAS. [*With solid sense.*] I think a crowd of well-dressed women is one of the most beautiful things in the world.

PHILIP. Have you ever seen an Eastern woman walk into a Bond Street tea shop?

THOMAS. No.

PHILIP. [*Forcefully.*] I have.

CONSTANTINE. Ah!

With one long, meditative exhalation he sends a little column of smoke into the air. MR. STATE *turns to him deferentially.*

MR. STATE. We are boring you, Mr. Madras, I'm afraid. You were Facile Princeps upon all these questions so long ago.

CONSTANTINE *speaks in the smoothest of voices.*

CONSTANTINE. No, I am not bored, Mr. State . . . only a little horrified.

MR. STATE. Why so?

CONSTANTINE. You see . . . I am a Mahommedan . . . and this attitude towards the other sex has become loathsome to me.

This bombshell, so delicately exploded, affects the company very variously. It will be some time before MR. HUXTABLE *grasps its meaning at all.* THOMAS *simply opens his mouth.* MR. STATE *has evidently found a new joy in life.* PHILIP, *to whom it seems no news, merely says in light protest . . .*

PHILIP. My dear Father!

MR. STATE. [*As he beams round.*] A real Mahommedan?

CONSTANTINE. I have become a Mahommedan. If you were not, it would be inconvenient to live permanently at Hit . . . a village upon the borders of Southern Arabia . . . that is my home. Besides, I was converted.

THOMAS. [*Having recovered enough breath.*] I didn't know you could become a Mahommedan.

CONSTANTINE. [*With some severity.*] You can become a Christian, sir.

THOMAS. [*A little shocked.*] Ah . . . not quite the same sort of thing.

MR. STATE. [*Who feels that he really is re-discovering the old world.*] But how very interesting! To a broad-

minded man . . . how extraordinarily interesting! Was it a sudden conversion?

CONSTANTINE. No . . . I had been searching for a religion . . . a common need in these times . . . and this is a very fine one, Mr. State.

MR. STATE. Is it? I must look it up. The Koran! Yes, I've never read the Koran . . . an oversight.

He makes a mental note. And slowly, slowly, the full iniquity of it has sunk into MR. HUXTABLE. *His face has gone from red to white and back again to red. He becomes articulate and vehement. He thumps the table.*

MR. HUXTABLE. And what about Amelia?

MR. STATE. [*With conciliatory calm.*] Who is Amelia?

PHILIP. Afterwards, Uncle.

MR. HUXTABLE. [*Thumping again.*] What about your wife? No, I won't be quiet, Phil! It's illegal.

CONSTANTINE. [*With a half-cold, half-kindly eye on him.*] Harry . . . I dislike to see you make yourself ridiculous.

Only this was needed.

MR. HUXTABLE. Who cares if I'm ridiculous? I've not spoken to you for thirty years . . . have I? That is . . . I've not taken more notice of you than I could help. And I come here to-day full of forgiveness . . . and curiosity . . . to see what you're really like now . . . and whether I've changed my mind . . . or whether I never really felt all that about you at all . . . and damned if you don't go and put up a fresh game on me! What about Amelia? Religion this time! Mahommedan, indeed . . . at your age! Can't you ever settle down? I beg your pardon, Mr. State. All right, Phil, afterwards! I've not done . . . but you're quite right . . . afterwards.

The gust over, MR. STATE, *who is a little be-blown*

by it at such close quarters, says, partly with a peace-making intention, partly in curiosity . . .

MR. STATE. But do you indulge in a Harem?

MR. HUXTABLE *is on his feet, righteously strepitant.*

MR. HUXTABLE. If you insult my sister by answering that question . . .

With a look and a gesture CONSTANTINE *can silence him. Then with the coldest dignity he replies . . .*

CONSTANTINE. My household, sir, is that of the ordinary Eastern gentleman of my position. We do not speak of our women in public.

MR. STATE. I'm sure I beg your pardon.

CONSTANTINE. Not at all. It is five years since I definitely retired from business and decided to consummate my affection for the East by settling down there. This final visit to Europe . . . partly to see you, Mr. State . . . was otherwise only to confirm my judgment on the question.

MR. STATE. Has it?

CONSTANTINE. It has. I was always out of place amongst you. I was sometimes tempted to regret my scandalous conduct . . . [*A slight stir from* MR. HUXTABLE.] Hush, Harry . . . hush! But I never could persuade myself to amend it. It is some slight personal satisfaction to me to discover . . . with a stranger's eye . . . that Europe in its attitude towards women is mad.

MR. STATE. Mad!

CONSTANTINE. Mad.

THOMAS. [*Who is all ears.*] I say!

CONSTANTINE. You possibly agree with me, Major Thomas.

THOMAS. [*Much taken aback.*] No . . . I don't think so.

CONSTANTINE. Many men do, but—poor fellows—they dare not say so. For instance, Mr. State, what can be

said of a community in which five men of some ability and dignity are met together to traffic in . . . what was the Numero of that aphrodisiac that so particularly attracted Major Thomas?

THOMAS *is shocked even to violence.*

THOMAS. No . . . really. I protest——

MR. STATE. [*Utterly calm.*] Easy, Major Thomas. Let us consider the accusation philosophically. [*Then with the sweetest smile.*] Surely that is a gross construction to put on the instinct of every beautiful woman to adorn herself.

CONSTANTINE. Why gross? I delight in pretty women, prettily adorned. To come home after a day's work to the welcome of one's women folk . . . to find them unharassed by notions of business or politics . . . ready to refresh one's spirit by attuning it to the gentler, sweeter side of life . . .

THOMAS. [*Making hearty atonement.*] Oh! Quite so . . . quite so.

CONSTANTINE. I thought you would agree with me, Major Thomas. That is the Mahommedan gentleman's domestic ideal.

THOMAS. [*Brought up short.*] Is it?

CONSTANTINE. But you don't expect to find your wife dressed like that . . . the diamanté and the . . .

THOMAS. [*Mental discomfort growing on him.*] No . . . that was a going out dress.

PHILIP. [*Greatly enjoying this contest.*] Oh . . . Tommy! Tommy!

THOMAS. [*In tortuosity of mind—and conscience.*] But I tell you if my wife would . . . that is, if any chap's wife will . . . I mean . . . [*Then he gets it out.*] If a woman always kept herself smart and attractive at home then a man would have no excuse for gadding about after other women.

MR. HUXTABLE *joins the fray, suddenly, snappily.*

MR. HUXTABLE. She sits looking after his children . . . what more does he want of her?

CONSTANTINE. Harry is a born husband, Major Thomas.

MR. HUXTABLE. I'm not a born libertine, I hope.

THOMAS. Libertine be damned.

MR. STATE. [*Pacifically.*] Gentlemen, gentlemen . . . these are abstract propositions.

MR. HUXTABLE. Gadding after another man's wife, perhaps! Though I don't think you ever did that, Constantine . . . I'll do you justice . . . I don't think you ever did.

CONSTANTINE. I never did.

PHILIP. [*With intense mischief.*] Oh, Tommy, Tommy . . . can you say the same?

THOMAS *is really flabbergasted at the indecency.*

THOMAS. Phil, that ain't nice . . . that ain't gentlemanly. And I wasn't thinking of that, and you know I wasn't. And . . . we ain't all so unattractive to women as you are.

MR. STATE *loses himself in enjoyment of this repartee.*

MR. STATE. Ah . . . Sour Grapes, Mr. Philip. We mustn't be personal . . . but is it Sour Grapes?

PHILIP. [*Very coolly on his defence.*] Thank you, Tommy . . . I can attract just the sort of woman I want to attract. But as long as it's Numero Cinq, Six or Sept that attracts you . . . well . . . so long will Madras Houses be an excellent investment for Mr. State.

That is the end of that little breeze, and CONSTANTINE'S *voice completes the quieting.*

CONSTANTINE. Phil is a cold-blooded egotist, and if women like him that is their misfortune. I know his way with a woman . . . coax her on to the intellectual plane, where he thinks he can better her. You have my

sympathy, Major Thomas. I also am as susceptible as Nature means a man to be . . . as all women must wish him to be. And I referred to these going out dresses because—candidly—I found myself obliged to leave a country where women are let loose with money to spend and time to waste. Encouraged to flaunt their charms on the very streets . . . proud if they see the busmen wink . . .

MR. HUXTABLE. Not busmen. [*He is only gently deprecating now.*]

CONSTANTINE. Proud, my dear Harry, if they see a cabman smile.

MR. HUXTABLE *looks around, and then nods solemnly and thoughtfully.*

MR. HUXTABLE. Yes, it's true. I'd deny it any other time, but I've been thinking a bit lately . . . and the things you think of once you start to think! And it's true. [*But with great chivalry.*] Only they don't know they do it. They don't know they do it. [*Then a doubt occurring.*] D'you think they know they do it, Phil?

PHILIP. Some of them suspect, Uncle.

MR. HUXTABLE. [*His faith unspoiled.*] No, what I say is it's Instinct . . . and we've just got to be as nice-minded about it as we can. There was Julia, this summer at Weymouth . . . that's one of my daughters. Bought herself a dress . . . not one of the Numero sort, of course . . . but very pretty . . . orange colour, it was . . . stripes. But you could see it a mile off on the parade . . . and her sisters all with their noses out of joint. I said to myself . . . Instinct . . .

Suddenly MR. STATE *rescues the discussion.*

MR. STATE. Yes, sir . . . the noblest Instinct of all . . . the Instinct to Perpetuate our Race. Let us take High Ground in this matter, gentlemen.

CONSTANTINE. [*Unstirred.*] The very highest, Mr. State. If you think that to turn Weymouth for a month

a year into a cockpit of haphazard love-making, with all the consequences that custom entails, is the best way of perpetuating your race . . . well, I disagree with you . . . but it's a point of view. What I ask is why Major Thomas and myself . . . already perhaps in a creditable state of marital perpetuation . . . should have our busy London lives obsessed by . . . What is this thing?

PHILIP. La belle Hélène's new hat, father.

CONSTANTINE. Now, that may be ugly . . . I hope I never made anything quite so ugly myself . . . but it's attractive.

PHILIP. [*With a wry face.*] No, father.

CONSTANTINE. Isn't it, Major Thomas?

THOMAS. [*Honestly.*] Well . . . it makes you look at em when you might not otherwise.

CONSTANTINE. Yes . . . it's provocative. Its intention is that none of the world's work shall be done while it's about. And when it's always about I honestly confess again that I cannot do my share. It's a terrible thing to be constantly conscious of women. They have their uses to the world . . . as you so happily phrased it, Mr. State . . . their perpetual use . . . and the world's interest is best served by keeping them strictly to it. Are these provocative ladies [*he fingers the hat again*] remarkable for perpetuation now-a-days?

Once more MR. STATE *bursts in—this time almost heart-brokenly.*

MR. STATE. I can't bear this, sir . . . I can't bear to take such a view of life . . . no man of feeling could. Besides, it's Reactionary . . . you're on the wrong tack. You must come back to us, sir. You gave us Joy and Pleasure . . . can we do without them? When you find yourself once more among the Loveliness you helped us to Worship you'll change your mind. What was the end of that little story of the Duchess? How, on the appoint-

ed night, attired in her Madras Creation, she swept into the Ball room with a frou-frou of silk skirt wafting Perfume as she came . . . while her younger rivals Pale before the Intoxication of her Beauty, and every man in the room . . . young and old . . . struggles for a Glimpse . . . a Word . . . a Look. [*Once again he starts to soar.*] A Ball room, sir . . . isn't it one of the Sweetest Sights in the World? When bright the lamps shine o'er Fair Women and Brave Men. Music arises with its Voluptuous Swell. Soft eyes look Love to eyes which speak again. And all goes Merry as a Marriage Bell! Byron, gentlemen, taught me at my mother's knee. The poet of Love and Liberty . . . read in every school in America.

At the end of this recitation, which MR. HUXTABLE *barely refrains from applauding,* CONSTANTINE *goes coolly on.*

CONSTANTINE. (Mr. State, that is my case.) The whole of our upper class life, which everyone with a say in the government of the country tries to lead . . . is now run as a ball room is run. Men swaggering before women . . . the women ogling the men. Once a lad got some training in manliness. But now from the very start . . . ! In your own progressive country . . . mixed education . . . oh, my dear sir . . . mixed education!

MR. STATE. A softening influence.

CONSTANTINE. [*Unexpectedly.*] Of course it is. And what has it sunk to, moreover . . . all education nowadays? Book-learning. Because woman's a dab at that . . . though it's of quite secondary importance to a man.

THOMAS. [*Feelingly.*] That's so.

CONSTANTINE. And moral influence. Woman's morality . . . the worst in the world.

PHILIP. Slave morality.

CONSTANTINE. Yes. Read Nietszche . . . as my friend Tarleton says. [*All one gathers from this cryptic allusion*

is that MR. HUXTABLE, *at any rate, reprobates Tarleton, and, inferentially, Nietszche.*] At Oxford and Cambridge it grows worse . . . married professors . . . Newnham and Girton . . . suffrage questions . . . purity questions.

MR. HUXTABLE. Of course, some of the novels . . .

CONSTANTINE. From seventeen to thirty-four . . . the years which a man should consecrate to the acquiring of political virtue . . . wherever he turns he is distracted, provoked, tantalised by the barefaced presence of women. How's he to keep a clear brain for the larger issues of life? Why do you soldiers, Major Thomas, volunteer with such alacrity for foreign service?

THOMAS. [*With a jump.*] Good God . . . I never thought of that.

CONSTANTINE. What's the result? Every great public question . . . all politics, all religion, all economy is being brought down to the level of women's emotion. Admirable in its way, . . . charming in its place! But softening, sentimentalising, enervating . . . lapping the world, if you let it, in the nursery cotton wool of prettiness and pettiness. Men don't realise how far rotted by the process they are . . . that's what's so fatal. We're used to a whole nation's anger being vented in scoldings . . . or rather we're getting used to the thought that it's naughty to be angry at all. Justice degenerates into kindness . . . that doesn't surprise us. Religion is a pretty hymn tune to keep us from fear of the dark. You four unfortunates might own the truth just for once . . . you needn't tell your wives.

MR. STATE. I am not married.

CONSTANTINE. I might have known it.

MR. STATE. [*A little astonished.*] But no matter.

CONSTANTINE. [*With full appreciation of what he says.*] Women haven't morals or intellect in our sense of the words. They have other incompatible qualities

quite as important, no doubt. But shut them away from public life and public exhibition. It's degrading to compete with them . . . it's as degrading to compete for them. Perhaps we're too late already . . . but oh, my dear sentimental Sir [*he addresses the pained though admiring* MR. STATE], if we could replant the laurel bushes thick enough we might yet rediscover the fine manly world we are losing.

Except PHILIP, *who sits detached and attentive, they are all rather depressed by this judgment upon them.* THOMAS *recovers sufficiently to ask . . .*

THOMAS. Are you advocating polygamy in England?

CONSTANTINE. That is what it should come to.

THOMAS. Well . . . I call that rather shocking. [*Then with some hopeful interest.*] And is it practical?

CONSTANTINE. I did not anticipate the reform in my lifetime . . . so I left for the East.

PHILIP. [*Finely.*] You did quite right, Father. I wish everyone of your way of thinking would do the same.

CONSTANTINE *is ready for him.*

CONSTANTINE. Are you prepared for so much depopulation? Think of the women who'd be off to-morrow.

MR. HUXTABLE *wakes from stupefaction to say with tremendous emphasis.*

MR. HUXTABLE. Never!

CONSTANTINE. Wrong, Harry.

MR. HUXTABLE. No, I'm not wrong just because you say so! You ought to listen to me a bit sometimes. I always listened to you.

CONSTANTINE. Bless your quick temper.

Who could resist CONSTANTINE'S *smile . . . Well, not* HUXTABLE.

MR. HUXTABLE. Oh . . . go on . . . tell me why I'm wrong . . . I daresay I am.

CONSTANTINE. Even if you have liked bringing up six

daughters and not getting them married . . . how have they liked it? You should have drowned them at birth, Harry . . .

MR. HUXTABLE. You must have your joke, mustn't you?

CONSTANTINE. Therefore, how much pleasanter for you . . . how much better for them . . . if you'd only to find one man ready, for a small consideration, to marry the lot.

MR. HUXTABLE. [*With intense delight.*] Now if I was to tell my wife that she wouldn't see the umour of it.

CONSTANTINE. The woman emancipator's last ditch, Mr. State, is the trust that women will side with him. Don't make any mistake. This is a serious question to them . . . of health and happiness . . . and sometimes of bread and butter. Quite apart from our customers here . . . kept women, every one of them . . .

MR. STATE. [*In some alarm.*] You don't say!

CONSTANTINE. [*Gently lifting him from the little trap.*] Economically. Kept by their husbands . . . or if they live on their dividends, kept by Society.

PHILIP. What about men who live on their dividends?

MR. STATE. No . . . now don't let us go on to politics.

CONSTANTINE. . . . And apart from the prisoners in that chaste little fortress on Denmark Hill . . . we used to employ, Harry, between us . . . what? . . . two or three hundred free and independent women . . . making clothes for the others, the ladies. They are as free as you like . . . free to go . . . free to starve. How much do they rejoice in their freedom to earn their living by ruining their health and stifling their instincts? Answer me, Harry, you monster of good-natured wickedness.

MR. HUXTABLE. What's that?

CONSTANTINE. You keep an industrial seraglio.

MR. HUXTABLE. A what!

CONSTANTINE. What else is your Roberts and Huxtable

but a harem of industry. Do you know that it would sicken with horror a good Mahommedan? You buy these girls in the open market . . . you keep them under lock and key . . .

MR. HUXTABLE. I do?

CONSTANTINE. Quite right, Harry, no harm done. [*Then his voice sinks to the utmost seriousness.*] But you coin your profits out of them by putting on exhibition for ten hours a day . . . their good looks, their good manners, their womanhood. Hired out it is to any stranger to hold as cheap for a few minutes as common decency allows. And when you've worn them out you turn them out . . . forget their very names . . . wouldn't know their faces if you met them selling matches at your door. For such treatment of potential motherhood, my Prophet condemns a man to Hell.

MR. HUXTABLE. [*Breathless with amazement.*] Well, I never did in all my born days! They can marry respectably, can't they? We like em to marry.

PHILIP. Yes, Uncle . . . I went into that question with Miss Yates and the Brigstocks this morning.

CONSTANTINE. [*Completing his case.*] I ask you all . . . what is to happen to you as a nation? Where are your future generations coming from? What with the well-kept women you flatter and æstheticise till they won't give you children, and the free women you work at market rates till they can't give you children . . .

MR. HUXTABLE. [*Half humorously sulky.*] Miss Yates has obliged us, anyhow.

PHILIP. [*Quickly capping him.*] And we're going to dismiss her.

MR. HUXTABLE *flashes again into protestation.*

MR. HUXTABLE. What else can we do? But I said you weren't to be hard on the girl. And I won't be upset like this. I want to take things as I find em . . . that is as I

used to find em . . . before there was any of these ideas going around . . . and I'm sure we were happier without em. Stifling their instincts . . . it's a horrid way to talk. And I don't believe it. I could send for every girl in the shop, and not one of em would hint at it to me. [*He has triumphed with himself so far, but his new-born intellectual conscience brings him down.*] Not that that proves anything, does it? I'm a fool. It's a beastly world. But I don't make it so, do I?

PHILIP. Who does?

MR. HUXTABLE. Other people. [PHILIP'S *eye is on him.*] Oh, I see it coming. You're going to say we're all the other people or something. I'm getting up to you.

CONSTANTINE. [*Very carefully.*] What is this about a Miss Yates?

PHILIP. A little bother down at Peckham. I can tell you afterwards if you like.

CONSTANTINE. No . . . there is no need.

Something in the tone of this last makes PHILIP *look up quickly. But* MR. STATE, *with a sudden thought, has first dived for his watch, and then, at the sight of it, gets up from the table.*

MR. STATE. Gentlemen, are you aware of the time? I may mention that I have a City appointment at four o'clock.

CONSTANTINE. [*Polite, but leisurely.*] Are we detaining you, Mr. State? Not universal or compulsory polygamy, Major Thomas. That would be nonsense. The very distribution of the sexes forbids it. But its recognition is one of the logical outcomes of the aristocratic method of government. And that's the only ultimate method . . . all others are interim plans for sifting out various aristocracies. The community of the future will specialise its functions. Women will find, I hope, some intellectual companions like my son, who will, besides, take a gentle

interest in the County Council. There will be single-hearted men like Harry, content with old-fashioned domesticity. There will be poets like you, Mr. State, to dream about women and to dress them . . . their bodies in silks and their virtues in phrases. But there must also be such men as Major Thomas and myself . . .

THOMAS *rises, yet again, to this piece of chaff.*

THOMAS. No, no! I'm not like that . . . not in the least. Because a fellow has been in the Army! Don't drag me in.

MR. STATE. As stimulating a conversation as I remember. A little hard to follow at times . . . but worth far more than the sacrifice of any mere business doings.

CONSTANTINE *takes the hint graciously, and is apt for business at once.*

CONSTANTINE. My fault! Shall we agree, Mr. State, to accept as much of your offer as you have no intention of altering? We are dealing for both the shops?

MR. STATE. Yes. What are we proposing to knock off their valuation, Major Thomas?

THOMAS. Eight thousand six hundred.

CONSTANTINE. Phil, what were we prepared to come down?

PHILIP. Nine thousand.

CONSTANTINE. A very creditable margin. Your offer is accepted, Mr. State.

MR. STATE *feels he must really play up to such magnificent conducting of business.*

MR. STATE. I should prefer to knock you down only eight thousand.

CONSTANTINE. [*Keeping the advantage.*] Isn't that merely romantic of you, Mr. State . . . not in the best form of business art?

THOMAS. But the conditions, you know?

CONSTANTINE. We accept your conditions. If they

won't work you'll be only anxious to alter them. So the business is done.

MR. HUXTABLE'S *eyes are wide.*

MR. HUXTABLE. But look here.

PHILIP. Uncle Harry has something to say . . .

MR. HUXTABLE. [*Assertively.*] Yes.

CONSTANTINE. Something d i f f e r e n t to say, Harry?

MR. HUXTABLE. [*After thinking it over.*] No.

So CONSTANTINE *returns happily to his subject.*

CONSTANTINE. What interests me about this Woman Question . . . now that I've settled my personal share in it . . . is to wonder how Europe, hampered by such an unsolved problem, can hope to stand up against the Oriental revival.

THOMAS. What's that?

CONSTANTINE. You'll hear of it shortly. Up from the Persian gulf to where I live we could grow enough wheat to feed the British Empire. Life there is simple and spacious . . . the air is not breathed out. All we want is a happy, hardy race of men, and under a decent government we shall soon beget it. But you Europeans! Is this the symbol you are marching to the future under? [*He has found again, and lifts up, la Belle Hélène's new hat.*] A cap of slavery! You are all idolaters of women . . . and they are the slaves of your idolatry.

MR. STATE. [*With undisguised admiration.*] Mr. Madras, I am proud to have met you again. If I say another word, I may be so interested in your reply that I shall miss my appointment. My coat? Thank you, Mr. Philip. I have to meet a man about a new system of country house drainage that he wants me to finance. I can hardly hope for another Transcendental Discussion upon that.

CONSTANTINE. Why not?

MR. STATE. If you were he! Good-bye, sir. Good-day,

Mr. Huxtable. Till to-morrow, Major Thomas. No, Mr. Philip, don't see me down.

He is off for his next deal. PHILIP *civilly takes him past the door, saying . . .*

PHILIP. Your car's at the Bond Street entrance, I expect.

And then he comes back. CONSTANTINE *is keeping half a friendly eye on* HUXTABLE, *who fidgets under it.* THOMAS *takes breath and expounds a grievance.*

THOMAS. That's how he settles business. But leaves us all the papers to do. I shall take mine home. The four-thirty gets me indoors by a quarter to six. Time for a cup of tea! Phil, have you got China tea?

PHILIP. Downstairs.

MR. HUXTABLE. I must be getting back, I think.

CONSTANTINE. Harry . . . you're running away from me.

MR. HUXTABLE. [*In frank amused confession.*] Yes . . . I was. Habit, y'know . . . habit.

CONSTANTINE. [*With the most friendly condescension.*] Suppose I go with you . . . part of the way. How do you go?

MR. HUXTABLE. On a bus.

CONSTANTINE. Suppose we go together . . . on a bus.

MR. HUXTABLE. [*Desperately cunning.*] It's all right . . . they won't see me with you. We don't close till seven.

CONSTANTINE'S *face sours.*

CONSTANTINE. No, to be sure. Phil, I can't come to dinner, I'm afraid.

PHILIP. Oh, I was going to tell you. Mother will be there. Tommy, you know the tea room.

THOMAS. [*All tact.*] Oh, quite!

PHILIP. Straight downstairs, first to the left and the second passage. I'll follow.

THOMAS *departs.* CONSTANTINE *says, indifferently . . .*

CONSTANTINE. Then I'll come in after dinner.

PHILIP. You don't mind?

CONSTANTINE. No.

There stands MR. HUXTABLE, *first on one foot and then on the other, desperately nervous.* CONSTANTINE *smiling at him.* PHILIP *cannot resist it. He says . . .*

PHILIP. It's afterwards now, Uncle. Fire away.

And is off. CONSTANTINE *still smiles. Poor* MR. HUXTABLE *makes a desperate effort to do the proper thing by this reprobate. He forms his face into a frown. It's no use; an answering smile will come. He surrenders.*

MR. HUXTABLE. Look here . . . don't let's talk about Amelia.

CONSTANTINE. No . . . never rake up the past.

MR. HUXTABLE. Lord! What else has a chap got to think of?

CONSTANTINE. That's why you look so old.

MR. HUXTABLE. Do I, now?

CONSTANTINE. What age are you?

MR. HUXTABLE. Sixty.

The two sit down together.

CONSTANTINE. You should come and stay with me at Hit . . . not far from Hillel . . . Hillel is Babylon, Harry.

MR. HUXTABLE. [*Curious.*] What's it like there?

CONSTANTINE. The house is white, and there are palm trees about it . . . and not far off flows the Euphrates.

MR. HUXTABLE. Just like in the Bible. [*His face is wistful.*] Constantine.

CONSTANTINE. Yes, Harry.

MR. HUXTABLE. You've said odder things this afternoon than I've ever heard you say before.

CONSTANTINE. Probably not.

MR. HUXTABLE. [*Wondering.*] And I haven't really minded em. But I believe it's the first time I've ever understood you . . . and p'raps that's just as well for me.

CONSTANTINE. [*Encouragingly.*] Oh . . . why, Harry?

MR. HUXTABLE. Because . . . d'you think it's only not being very clever keeps us . . . well behaved?

CONSTANTINE. Has it kept you happy?

MR. HUXTABLE. [*Impatient at the petty word.*] Anyone can be happy. What worries me is having got to my age and only just beginning to understand anything at all. And you can't learn it out of books, old man. Books don't tell you the truth . . . at least not any that I can find. I wonder if I'd been a bit of a dog like you . . . ? But there it is . . . you can't do things on purpose. And what's more, don't you go to think I'd have done them if I could . . . knowing them to be wrong. [*Then comes a discovery.*] But I was always jealous of you, Constantine, for you seemed to get the best of everything . . . and I know people couldn't help being fond of you . . . for I was fond of you myself, whatever you did. That was odd to start with. And now here we are, both of us old chaps . . .

CONSTANTINE. [*As he throws back his head.*] I am not old.

MR. HUXTABLE. [*With sudden misgiving.*] You don't repent, do you?

CONSTANTINE. What of?

MR. HUXTABLE. Katherine said this morning that you might have . . . but I wasn't afraid of that. [*Now he wags his head wisely.*] You know . . . you evil-doers . . . you upset us all, and you hurt our feelings, and of course you ought to be ashamed of yourself. But . . .

well . . . it's like the only time I went abroad. I was sick going . . . I was orribly uncomfortable . . . I ated the cooking . . . I was sick coming back. But I wouldn't have missed it . . . !

CONSTANTINE. [*In affectionate good fellowship.*] Come to Arabia, Harry.

MR. HUXTABLE. [*Humorously pathetic about it.*] Don't you make game of me. My time's over. What have I done with it, now? Married. Brought up a family. Been master to a few hundred girls and fellows who never really cared a bit for me. I've been made a convenience of . . . that's my life. That's where I envy you. You've had your own way . . . and you don't look now as if you'd be damned for it, either.

CONSTANTINE. [*In gentlemanly defiance.*] I shan't be.

MR. HUXTABLE *shakes a fist, somewhat, though unconsciously, in the direction of the ceiling.*

MR. HUXTABLE. It's not fair, and I don't care who hears me say so.

CONSTANTINE. Suppose we shout it from the top of the bus.

As they start, MR. HUXTABLE *returns to his mundane, responsible self.*

MR. HUXTABLE. But you know, old man . . . you'll excuse me, I'm sure . . . and it's all very well having theories and being able to talk . . . still, you did treat Amelia very badly . . . and those other ones, too . . . say what you like! Let go my arm, will you!

CONSTANTINE. Why?

MR. HUXTABLE. [*His scruples less strong than the soft touch of* CONSTANTINE'S *hand.*] Well, p'raps you needn't. [*A thought strikes him.*] Are you really going away for good this time?

CONSTANTINE. To-morrow.

MR. HUXTABLE. [*Beaming on him.*] Then come home and see mother and the girls.

MAJOR THOMAS *comes back, looking about him.*

THOMAS. Excuse me . . . I left my hat.

CONSTANTINE. It will make them very uncomfortable.

MR. HUXTABLE. [*His smile fading.*] D'you think so? Won't it do em good . . . broaden their minds?

PHILIP *comes back, too.*

MR. HUXTABLE. Phil . . . shall I take your father ome to call?

PHILIP. [*After one gasp at the prospect, says with great cheerfulness . . .*] Certainly.

CONSTANTINE. I'll be with you by nine, Phil.

MR. HUXTABLE'S *dare-devil heart fails once more.*

MR. HUXTABLE. I say . . . better not be too friendly through the shop.

CONSTANTINE *smiles still, but does not loose his arm. Off they go.*

THOMAS. [*Still searching.*] Where the devil did I put it?

PHILIP. Pity you can't take father's place at dinner, Tommy.

THOMAS *stops and looks at him aggrievedly.*

THOMAS. Are you chaffing me?

PHILIP. We might get some further light on the Woman Question. My mother's opinion and Jessica's upon such men as you and my father.

He picks up some papers and sits to them at the table.

THOMAS. Look here, Phil . . . don't you aggravate me into behaving rashly. Here it is. [*He has found his hat on a gas-bracket—and he slams it on.*]

PHILIP. With Jessica?

THOMAS. [*With ferocious gallantry.*] Yes . . . a damned attractive woman.

PHILIP. After all . . . as an abstract proposition, Tommy . . . polyandry is just as simple a way . . . and as far as we know, as much Nature's way as the other. We ought to have put that point to the gentle Mahommedan.

THOMAS. [*After vainly considering this for a moment.*] Phil, I should like to see you in love with a woman . . . It'd serve you right.

Suddenly PHILIP *drops his mocking tone and his face grows gentle and grave.*

PHILIP. Tommy . . . what's the purpose of it all? Apart from the sentimental wallowings of Mr. Eustace Perrin State . . . and putting that Lord of Creation, my father, on one side for a moment . . . what do we slow-breeding, civilised people get out of love . . . and the beauty of women . . . and the artistic setting that beauty demands? For which we do pay rather a big price, you know, Tommy. What do we get for it?

THOMAS. [*Utterly at sea.*] I don't know.

PHILIP. It's an important question. Think it over in the train.

THOMAS. Old chap . . . I beg your pardon . . . the County Council is the best place for you. It'll stop your addling over these silly conundrums.

PHILIP. [*Subtly.*] On the contrary.

THOMAS. [*His favourite phrase again.*] What do you mean?

PHILIP. Get out . . . you'll miss that four-thirty.

THOMAS *gets out.* PHILIP *gets desperately to loathed business.*

ACT IV

PHILIP, *his mother, and* JESSICA, *are sitting, after dinner, round the drawing-room fire in Phillimore Gardens.* JESSICA, *rather, is away upon the bench of her long, black piano, sorting bound books of music, and the firelight hardly reaches her. But it flickers over* MRS. MADRAS, *and though it marks more deeply the little bitter lines on her face, it leaves a glow there in recompense. She sits, poor, anxious old lady, gazing, not into the fire, but at the shining copper-fender, her hands on her lap, as usual. Every now and then she lifts her head to listen.* PHILIP *is comfortable upon the sofa opposite; he is smoking, and is deep, besides, in some weighty volume, the Longman Edition of the Minority Report of the Poor Law Commission, perhaps.*

It is a charming room. The walls are grey, the paint is a darker grey. The curtains to the two long windows are of the gentlest pink brocade; the lights that hang on plain little brackets from the walls are a soft pink, too, and there is no other colour in the room, but the maziness of some Persian rugs on the floor and the mellowed brilliancy of the Arundel prints on the walls. There is no more furniture than there need be; there is no more light than there need be; yet it is not empty or dreary. There is just nothing to jar, nothing to prevent a sensitive soul finding rest there.

The parlour maid comes in; she is dressed in grey, too, capless, some black ribbons about her. [Really, JESSICA'S *home inclines to be a little precious!] She brings letters, one for* JESSICA, *two for* PHILIP, *and departs.*

PHILIP. Last post.

JESSICA. Half-past nine. I suppose your father means to come?

PHILIP. He said so.

MRS. MADRAS. Is your letter interesting, Jessica?

JESSICA. A receipt.

MRS. MADRAS. Do you run bills?

JESSICA. Lots.

MRS. MADRAS. Is that quite wise?

JESSICA. The tradesmen prefer it.

With that she walks to her writing table. JESSICA'S *manner to her mother-in-law is over-courteous, an unkind weapon against which the old lady, but half conscious of it, is quite defenceless.* PHILIP *has opened his second letter, and whistles, at its contents, a bar of a tune that is in his head.*

JESSICA. What's the matter, Phil?

To emphasize his feelings he performs the second bar with variations.

JESSICA. As bad as that?

For final comment he brings the matter to a full close on one expressive note, and puts the letter away. JESSICA *flicks at him amusedly.*

MRS. MADRAS. How absurd! You can't tell in the least what he means.

JESSICA. No.

With forced patience she wanders back to her piano.

MRS. MADRAS. You might play us something, Jessica . . . just to pass the time.

Unobserved. JESSICA *casts her eyes up to the ceiling.*

JESSICA. What will you have?

MRS. MADRAS. I am sure you play all the latest things.

JESSICA. I'm afraid you don't really like my playing.

MRS. MADRAS. I do think it's a little professional. I prefer something softer.

JESSICA *leaves the piano.*

JESSICA. I'm afraid we are giving you a dull evening.

MRS. MADRAS. [*With that suddenness which seems to characterise the* HUXTABLE *family.*] Why do you never call me mother, Jessica?

JESSICA. Don't I?

MRS. MADRAS. [*Resenting prevarication.*] You know you don't.

JESSICA. I suppose I don't think of you just like that.

MRS. MADRAS. What has that to do with it?

JESSICA. [*More coldly courteous than ever.*] Nothing . . . Mother.

MRS. MADRAS. That's not a very nice manner of giving way, either, is it?

JESSICA. [*On the edge of an outburst.*] It seemed to me sufficiently childish.

MRS. MADRAS. [*Parading a double injury.*] I don't know what you mean. It's easy to be too clever for me, Jessica.

PHILIP *mercifully intervenes.*

PHILIP. Mother, what do you think parents gain by insisting on respect and affection from grown-up children?

MRS. MADRAS. Isn't it their right?

PHILIP. But I asked what they gained.

MRS. MADRAS. Isn't it natural? When an old woman has lost her husband, or worse, if she's to lose her children, too, what has she left?

JESSICA. [*Recovering a little kindness.*] Her womanhood, Mother.

PHILIP. Her old-womanhood. You know, it may be a very beautiful possession.

*The parlour maid announces "*MR. CONSTANTINE MADRAS.*" There stands Constantine in the bright light of the hall, more dramatically dignified than ever. As he comes in, though, it seems as if there was the slightest strain in his charming manners. He has not changed his clothes for the evening. He goes straight to* JESSICA, *and it seems that he has a curious soft way of shaking hands with women.*

CONSTANTINE. How do you do, Jessica? I find you looking beautiful.

JESSICA *acknowledges the compliment with a little disdainful bend of the head and leaves him, then with a glance at* PHILIP *leaves the room.* CONSTANTINE *comes towards his wife. She does not look up, but her face wrinkles pathetically. So he speaks at last.*

CONSTANTINE. Well, Amelia?

For MRS. MADRAS *it must be resentment or tears, or both. Resentment comes first.*

MRS. MADRAS. Is that the way to speak to me after thirty years?

CONSTANTINE. [*Amicably.*] Perhaps it isn't. But there's not much variety of choice in greetings, is there?

PHILIP, *nodding to his father, has edged to the door, and now edges out of it.*

CONSTANTINE. They leave us alone. We might be an engaged couple.

She stays silent, distressfully avoiding his eye. He takes a chair and sits by her. He would say [as JESSICA *no doubt would say of herself] that he speaks kindly to her.*

CONSTANTINE. Well, Amelia? I beg your pardon. I

repeat myself, and you dislike the phrase. I hope, though, that you are quite well? Don't cry, dear Amelia . . . unless, of course, you want to cry. Well, then . . . cry. And, when you've finished crying . . . there's no hurry . . . you shall tell me why you wished to see me . . . and run the risk of upsetting yourself like this.

MRS. MADRAS. [*Dabbing her eyes.*] I don't often cry. I don't often get a chance.

CONSTANTINE. I fear that is only one way of saying that you miss me.

The handkerchief is put away, and she faces him.

MRS. MADRAS. Are you really going back to that country to-morrow?

CONSTANTINE. To-morrow morning.

MRS. MADRAS. For good?

CONSTANTINE. [*With thanksgiving.*] For ever.

MRS. MADRAS. [*Desperately resolute.*] Will you take me with you?

It takes CONSTANTINE *just a moment to recover.*

CONSTANTINE. No, Amelia, I will not.

MRS. MADRAS. [*Re-acting a little hysterically.*] I'm sure I don't want to go, and I'm sure I never meant to ask you. But you haven't changed a bit, Constantine . . . in spite of your beard. [*Then the voice saddens and almost dies away.*] I have.

CONSTANTINE. Only externally, I'm sure.

MRS. MADRAS. Why did you ever marry me? You married me for my money.

CONSTANTINE. [*Sighting boredom.*] It is so long ago.

MRS. MADRAS. It isn't . . . it seems like yesterday. Didn't you marry me for my money?

CONSTANTINE. Partly, Amelia, partly. Why did you marry me?

MRS. MADRAS. I wanted to. I was a fool.

CONSTANTINE. [*Evenly still.*] You were a fool, per-

haps, to grumble at the consequence of getting what you wanted. It would have been kinder of me, no doubt, not to marry you. But I was more impetuous then, and, of course, less experienced. I didn't realise you never could change your idea of what a good husband must be, nor how necessary it would become that you should.

MRS. MADRAS. How dare you make excuses for the way you treated me?

CONSTANTINE. There were two excuses. I was the first. I'm afraid that you ultimately became the second.

MRS. MADRAS. [*With spirit.*] I only stood up for my rights.

CONSTANTINE. You got them, too. We separated, and there was an end of it.

MRS. MADRAS. I've never been happy since.

CONSTANTINE. That is nothing to be proud of, my dear.

MRS. MADRAS *feels the strangeness between them wearing off.*

MRS. MADRAS. What happened to that woman and her son . . . that Flora?

CONSTANTINE. The son is an engineer . . . promises very well, his employers tell me. Flora lives at Hitchin . . . quite comfortably, I have reason to believe.

MRS. MADRAS. She was older than me.

CONSTANTINE. About the same age, I think.

MRS. MADRAS. You've given her money?

CONSTANTINE. [*His eyebrows up.*] Certainly . . . they were both provided for.

MRS. MADRAS. Don't you expect me to be jealous?

CONSTANTINE. [*With a sigh.*] Still, Amelia?

MRS. MADRAS. Do you ever see her now?

CONSTANTINE. I haven't seen her for years.

MRS. MADRAS. It seems to me she has been just as well treated as I have . . . if not better.

CONSTANTINE. She expected less.

MRS. MADRAS. And what about the others?

CONSTANTINE. [*His patience giving out.*] No, really, it's thirty years ago . . . I cannot fight my battles over again. Please tell me what I can do for you beyond taking you back with me.

MRS. MADRAS. [*Cowering to the least harshness.*] I didn't mean that. I don't know what made me say it. But it's dreadful seeing you once more and being alone with you.

CONSTANTINE. Now, Amelia, are you going to cry again?

MRS. MADRAS. [*Setting her teeth.*] No.

CONSTANTINE. That's right.

MRS. MADRAS *really does pull herself together, and becomes intensely reasonable.*

MRS. MADRAS. What I really want you to do, if you please, Constantine, is not to go away. I don't expect us to live together . . . after the way you have behaved I could not consent to such a thing. But somebody must look after you when you are ill, and, what's more, I don't think you ought to go and die out of your own country.

CONSTANTINE. [*Meeting reason with reason.*] My dear . . . I have formed other ties.

MRS. MADRAS. Will you please explain exactly what you mean by that?

CONSTANTINE. I am a Mahommedan.

MRS. MADRAS. Nonsense!

CONSTANTINE. Possibly you are not acquainted with the Mahommedan marriage laws.

MRS. MADRAS. D'you mean to say you're not married to me?

CONSTANTINE. No . . . though it was not considered necessary for me to take that into account in conforming to it . . . I did.

MRS. MADRAS. Well. . . I never thought you could be-

have any worse. Why weren't you satisfied in making me unhappy? If you've gone and committed blasphemy as well . . . I don't know what's to become of you, Constantine.

CONSTANTINE. Amelia, if I had been a Mahommedan from the beginning you might be living happily with me now.

MRS. MADRAS. How can you say such a horrible thing? Suppose it were true?

CONSTANTINE. I came from the East.

MRS. MADRAS. You didn't.

CONSTANTINE. Let us be quite accurate. My grandfather was a Smyrna Jew.

MRS. MADRAS. You never knew him. Your mother brought you up a Baptist.

CONSTANTINE. I was an unworthy Baptist. As a Baptist I owe you apologies for my conduct. What does that excellent creed owe me for the little hells of temptation and shame and remorse that I passed through because of it?

MRS. MADRAS. [*In pathetic wonder.*] Did you, Constantine?

CONSTANTINE. I did.

MRS. MADRAS. You never told me.

CONSTANTINE. [*With manly pride.*] I should think not.

MRS. MADRAS. But I was longing to have you say you were sorry, and let me forgive you. Twice and three times I'd have forgiven you . . . and you knew it, Constantine.

CONSTANTINE *recovers his humour, his cool courtesy, and his inhumanity, which he had momentarily lost.*

CONSTANTINE. Yes, it wasn't so easy to escape your

forgiveness. If it weren't for Mahomet, the Prophet of God, Amelia, I should hardly be escaping it now.

PHILIP *comes delicately in.*

PHILIP. I beg pardon . . . only my book. [*Which he takes from the piano.*]

CONSTANTINE. Don't go, Phil.

So PHILIP *joins them, and then, as silence supervenes, says, with obvious cheerfulness.*

PHILIP. How are you getting on?

MRS. MADRAS. [*Her tongue released.*] Philip, don't be flippant. It's just as your cousin Ernest said. Your father has gone and pretended to marry a lot of wretched women out in that country you showed me on the map, and I don't know what's to be done. My head's going round.

CONSTANTINE. Not a lot, Amelia.

MRS. MADRAS. And if anybody had told me, when I was a girl at school, and learning about such things in History and Geography, that I should ever find myself in such a situation as this, I wouldn't have believed them. [*She piles up the agony.*] Constantine, how are you going to face me Hereafter? Have you thought of that? Wasn't our marriage made in Heaven? I must know what is going to happen to us . . . I simply must. I have always prayed that you might come back to me, and that I might close your eyes in death. You know I have, Philip, and I've asked you to tell him so. He has no right to go and do such wicked things. You're mine in the sight of God, Constantine, and you can't deny it.

Without warning, CONSTANTINE *loses his temper, jumps up and thunders at her.*

CONSTANTINE. Woman . . . be silent. [*Then, as in shame, he turns his back on her and says in the coldest voice . . .*] Philip, I have several things to talk over

with you. Suggest to your mother that she should leave us alone.

PHILIP. [*Protesting against both temper and dignity.*] I shall do nothing of the sort. While my father's in England, and you're in our house, he can at least treat his wife with politeness.

MRS. MADRAS. [*With meek satisfaction.*] I'd rather he didn't . . . it's only laughing at me. I'll go to bed. I'd much rather he lost his temper.

She gets up to go. CONSTANTINE'S *bitter voice stops her.*

CONSTANTINE. Phil . . . when you were a boy . . . your mother and I once quarrelled in your presence.

PHILIP. [*In bitterness, too.*] I remember.

CONSTANTINE. I'm ashamed of it to this day.

MRS. MADRAS. [*Quite pleasantly.*] Well . . . I'm sure I don't remember it. What about?

CONSTANTINE. Oh . . . this terrible country. Every hour I stay in it seems to rob me of some atom of self-respect.

MRS. MADRAS *joins battle again at this.*

MRS. MADRAS. Then why did you come back? And why haven't you been to see me before . . . or written to me?

CONSTANTINE. [*In humorous despair.*] Amelia, don't aggravate me any more. Go to bed, if you're going.

MRS. MADRAS. I wish I'd never seen you again.

PHILIP. Good-night, Mother.

PHILIP *gets her to the door and kisses her kindly. Then* CONSTANTINE *says, with all the meaning possible . . .*

CONSTANTINE. Good-bye, Amelia.

She turns, the bright hall light falling on her, looks at him hatefully, makes no other reply, goes. PHILIP *comes back to the fire. All this is bitter to him, too. He eyes his father.*

CONSTANTINE. I'm sorry. I'm upset. I was upset when I came here.

PHILIP. What about? The visit to Denmark Hill?

CONSTANTINE. [*Who has apparently forgotten that.*] No . . . I didn't go there, after all.

PHILIP. Funked it?

CONSTANTINE. [*Accepting the gibe.*] I daresay. Once we were off the bus, Harry began to mutter about hurting their feelings. I daresay I was funking it, too. I told him to tell them how unbendingly moral he had been with me. He shed three tears as we parted.

PHILIP. Yes . . . my mother was alone here. She's a disappointed woman . . . peevish with ill health. One has her at a disadvantage. But Aunt Kate . . . unveiled and confident, with six corseted daughters to back her!

CONSTANTINE. You think, of course, that I've always treated your mother badly?

PHILIP. I can't help thinking so. Was it the only way to treat her?

CONSTANTINE. Was I meant to pass the rest of a lifetime making her forget that she was as unhappy as people who have outlived their purpose always are?

PHILIP. Personally, I have this grudge against you both, my dear father. As the son of a quarrelsome marriage, I have grown up inclined to dislike men and despise women. You're so full of this purpose of getting the next generation born. Suppose you thought a little more of its upbringing.

CONSTANTINE. What was wrong with yours?

PHILIP. I had no home.

CONSTANTINE. You spent a Sunday with me every month. You went to the manliest school I could find.

PHILIP. Never mind how I learnt Latin and Greek. Who taught me that every pretty, helpless woman was a

man's prey . . . and how to order my wife out of the room?

CONSTANTINE. [*With a shrug.*] My dear boy . . . they like it.

PHILIP. D o they?

CONSTANTINE. Well . . . how else are you to manage them?

PHILIP. Father, don't you realise that . . . in decadent England, at least, this manliness of yours is getting a little out of date . . . that you and your kind begin to look foolish at last?

CONSTANTINE. [*Voicing the discomfort that possesses him.*] I daresay. Thank God, I shall be quit of the country to-morrow! I got here late this evening because I travelled three stations too far in that Tube, sitting opposite such a pretty little devil. She was so alive . . . so crying out for conquest . . . she had that curve of the instep and the little trick of swinging her foot that I never could resist. How does a man resist it? Yes. That's ridiculous and ignominious and degrading. I escaped from England to escape from it. Old age here . . . a loose lip and a furtive eye. I'd have asked you to shoot me first.

PHILIP. Was it that upset you?

CONSTANTINE. No. [*He frowns; his thoughts are much elsewhere. There is a moment's silence.* PHILIP *breaks it.*]

PHILIP. Father, what do you know about this Miss Yates affair?

CONSTANTINE *gives him a sharp look; then carefully casual . . .*

CONSTANTINE. What you've told me.

PHILIP. No more?

CONSTANTINE. Is there more to know?

PHILIP *fishes out and hands across the letter over which he whistled.*

PHILIP. This has just come from Miss Chancellor.

CONSTANTINE. Who's she?

PHILIP. The housekeeper at Peckham, who rashly accused Brigstock of being the other responsible party.

CONSTANTINE. Is he?

PHILIP. I think not. But she encloses a letter she has just had from Brigstock's solicitors, to the effect that both an apology and compensation is due to him unless the slander is to come into court. Hers faithfully, Meyrick & Hodges.

CONSTANTINE. I don't know them.

PHILIP. We were all still making personal remarks at half-past twelve to-day . . . so by their expedition I should say they both are and are not a first-class firm. But suppose the whole thing is made public . . . then the question of the parentage must be cleared up. Miss Yates says it's nobody's business but hers. That's an odd idea, in which, if she chooses to have it, the law seems to support her.

The steady eye and the steady voice have seemed to make the tension unbearable, and PHILIP *has meant them to. But he hardly expected this outburst.* CONSTANTINE, *in his own dramatically dignified way, has a fit of hysterics.*

CONSTANTINE. Phil, I saw the little baggage when the shop closed. I insisted on her meeting me. You know how I've always behaved over these matters. No one could have been kinder. But she refused money.

PHILIP. [*Calling on the gods to witness this occasion.*] Well . . . I might have guessed. Oh . . . you incorrigible old man!

CONSTANTINE. She insulted me . . . said she'd done with me . . . denied me the right to my own child. I'd

even have taken her away. But you're helpless. I never felt so degraded in my life.

PHILIP. Serve you right!

CONSTANTINE. . . . But the girl's mad! Think of my feelings. What does it make of *me*? Did she know what she was saying?

PHILIP. [*Framing his thoughts at last.*] Possibly not . . . but I'm thankful some woman's been found at last to put you in your place.

These parental-filial passages have brought the two of them face to face, strung to shouting pitch. They become aware of it when JESSICA *walks in very gently.*

JESSICA. Your mother gone?

PHILIP. To bed.

JESSICA. [*Conscious of thunder.*] Am I intruding? I sent Phil in for his book a while ago. He didn't return, so I judged that he was. Perhaps I'm not?

CONSTANTINE *is master of himself again, though the hand holding the letter which* PHILIP *gave him does tremble a little still.*

CONSTANTINE. Well . . . what does Miss Chancellor want?

PHILIP. She asks my advice.

CONSTANTINE. Dismiss Baxter.

PHILIP. D'you mean Brigstock?

CONSTANTINE. Brigstock, then. Dismiss him.

PHILIP. What's he done to deserve it?

CONSTANTINE. He seems a nonentity of a fellow, and without grit enough to own up to his wife and risk his place. D'you want to protect a man from the consequences of what he *is*?

PHILIP. Society conspires to.

CONSTANTINE. Then pay him fifty pounds for the dam-

age to his silly little reputation. That'll be a just consequence to you of sentimentalising over him.

PHILIP. And stick to Miss Chancellor?

CONSTANTINE. Certainly. Thank her from the firm for nosing out such a scandal.

PHILIP. And what about Miss Yates?

JESSICA. The girl in your office this morning?

PHILIP. Yes.

JESSICA. In the usual trouble?

PHILIP. How d'you know that?

JESSICA. By the tone of your voice.

CONSTANTINE. [*More slowly, more carefully, a little resentfully.*] Dismiss Miss Yates. Keep your eye on her . . . and in a year's time find her a better place . . . if you can . . . in one of these new Madras Houses of State's. He seems to pay very well. [*Then with a breath of relief he becomes his old charming self again.*] Let us change the subject. How is Mildred, Jessica?

JESSICA. Growing.

CONSTANTINE. I've an appointment with my solicitor to-night . . . ten o'clock. There will be two or three thousand pounds to come to that young lady by my will. I mean to leave it as a dowry for her marriage . . . its interest to be paid to her if she's a spinster at thirty . . . which Heaven forbid.

PHILIP. What are you doing with the rest, Father?

CONSTANTINE. There are one or two . . . legacies of honour, shall I call them? What remains will come to you.

PHILIP. Yes . . . I don't want it, thank you.

CONSTANTINE. It isn't much.

PHILIP. Take it to Hit, that charming village on the borders of Southern Arabia. Stick it in the ground . . . let it breed more corn and oil for you. We've too much of it already . . . it breeds idleness here.

CONSTANTINE. Dear me!

They settle into a chat.

JESSICA. We're discussing a reduction of our income by a few hundreds a year.

PHILIP. I'm refusing State's directorship.

JESSICA. Though I'm waiting for Phil to tell me where the saving's to come in.

PHILIP. We ought to change that school of Mildred's, for one thing.

JESSICA. Nonsense, Phil!

PHILIP. My dear father, I spent a day there with the child, and upon my word, the only thing she's being taught which will not be a mere idle accomplishment is gardening. And even in their gardens . . . No vegetables allowed!

JESSICA. Phil, I don't mean to have any nonsense with Mildred about earning her living. Accomplished women have a very good time in this world . . . serious women don't. I want my daughter to be happy.

PHILIP. If we've only enough life left to be happy with we must keep ourselves decently poor.

CONSTANTINE *gets up.*

CONSTANTINE. Could you get me a taxi, I wonder? It had started raining when I came.

PHILIP. There'll be one on the stand opposite.

CONSTANTINE. I mustn't be too late for Voysey. He makes a favour of coming after hours.

JESSICA. I frankly cultivate expensive tastes. I like to have things beautiful around me. I don't know what else civilisation means.

CONSTANTINE. I am sure that Philip can refuse you nothing.

PHILIP. If I do dismiss Miss Yates, I wonder if I could do it brutally enough to induce her to accept some compensation.

JESSICA. What for?

PHILIP. She won't take money from this gentleman . . . whoever he is . . . that is, she won't be bribed into admitting her shame.

JESSICA. When a woman has gone wrong mayn't it be her duty to other women to own up to it?

CONSTANTINE. [*Who has stood still the while, stroking his beard.*] If your auditors won't pass any decent sum, I should be happy to send you a cheque, Phil.

PHILIP. [*With a wry smile.*] That would be very generous of you, Father.

CONSTANTINE. Good-bye, Jessica.

JESSICA. Good-bye.

CONSTANTINE. Philip is fortunate in his marriage.

JESSICA. So good of you to remind him of that.

CONSTANTINE. You have a charming home. I wonder how much of your womanly civilisation it would have needed to conquer me. Well . . . I leave you to your conversation. A pleasant life to you.

He bends over her hand as if to kiss it. She takes it, as if fastidiously, out of his soft grasp. So he bows again and leaves her.

CONSTANTINE. Victoria at eleven o'clock to-morrow, Philip.

PHILIP. Yes . . . I'll see you off.

CONSTANTINE. I have to do a little shopping quite early.

PHILIP. Shopping! What can the West send the East?

CONSTANTINE. I must take back a trinket or two.

PHILIP. To be sure. We do the same on our travels.

PHILIP *sees him through the hall to the front door, hails a stray cab, and is quit of him.* JESSICA *moves about as if to free the air of this visitation, and when* PHILIP *comes back . . .*

JESSICA. Does your father usually scatter cheques so generously and carelessly?

PHILIP. Jessica, while I have every respect for that young lady's independence . . . still two hundred pounds would be all to the good of the child's upbringing . . . and why shouldn't Miss Yates keep her secret?

JESSICA. Yes. I don't like your father. And I'm sometimes afraid that you're only an intellectual edition of him. It's very vital, of course, to go about seducing everybody to your own way of thinking. But really it's not quite civilised. You ought to learn to talk about the weather.

PHILIP. I cannot talk about what can't be helped.

He had settled to a chair and a cigarette, but on the impulse he abandons both and starts a lively argument instead. PHILIP'S *excited arguments are carried on in short dashes about the room and with queer un-English gestures.*

PHILIP. And I wonder more and more what the devil you all mean by civilisation. This room is civilisation. Whose civilisation? Not ours.

JESSICA. [*In mock despair.*] Oh, dear!

PHILIP. Cheer up. Didn't you marry me because I thought more of Bach than Offenbach? Why shouldn't you share a fresh set of convictions? This sort of marriage is worth while, you know. Even one's quarrels have a certain dignity.

JESSICA. Go ahead . . . bless your heart.

PHILIP. [*Shaking his fist at the world in general.*] Whitechapel High Street's our civilisation.

JESSICA. I don't know it.

PHILIP. Therefore you don't much matter, my dear . . . any more than my father did with his view of life as a sort of love-chase. [*He surveys the charming room that is his home.*] Persian carpet on the floor. Last supper, by Ghirlandajo, over the mantelpiece. The sofa you're sitting on was made in a forgotten France. This

is a museum. And down at that precious school what are they cultivating Mildred's mind into but another museum . . . of good manners and good taste and . . . [*He catches* JESSICA'S *half scornful, half kindly-quizzical look.*] Are we going to have a row about this?

JESSICA. If you Idealists want Mildred to live in the Whitechapel Road . . . make it a fit place for her.

PHILIP. [*Taking the thrust and enjoyably returning it.*] When she lives in it it will become so. Why do I give up designing dresses and running a fashion shop to go on the County Council . . . if I can get on? And not to cut a fine figure there, either. But to be on a committee or committees. Not to talk finely even then . . . Lord keep me from the temptation . . . but to do dull, hard work over drains and disinfectants and . . .

JESSICA. Well . . . why, Phil? I may as well know.

PHILIP. To save my soul alive.

JESSICA. I'm sure I hope you may. But what is it we're to cultivate in poor Mildred's soul?

PHILIP *stops in his walk, and then* . . .

PHILIP. Why not a sense of ugliness? Have you ever really looked at a London street . . . walked slowly up and down it three times . . . carefully testing it with every cultured sense?

JESSICA. Yes. . . . it's loathsome.

PHILIP. Then what have you done?

JESSICA. What can one do?

PHILIP. Come home to play a sonata of Beethoven! Does that drown the sights and the sounds and the smell of it?

JESSICA. Yes . . . it does.

PHILIP. [*In fierce revolt.*] Not to me . . . my God . . . not to me!

JESSICA. [*Gently bitter.*] For so many women, Phil, art has to make life possible.

PHILIP. Suppose we teach Mildred to look out of the window at the life outside. We want to make that impossible. Neither Art nor Religion nor good manners have made of the world a place I'll go on living in if I can help it. [*He throws himself into a chair.*] D'you remember in my young days when I used to spend part of a holiday lecturing on Shelley?

JESSICA. Yes.

PHILIP. I remember once travelling in the train with a poor wretch who lived . . . so he told me . . . on what margins of profit he could pick up by standing rather incompetently between the corn field and the baker . . . or the coal mine and the fire . . . or the landowner and the tenant . . . I forget which. And he was weary and irritable and unhealthy. And he hated Jones . . . because Jones had done him out of a half per cent. on two hundred and fifty pounds . . . and if the sum had been bigger he'd have sued him, so he would. And the end of Prometheus was running in my head . . . This, like thy glory, Titan, is to be Good, great and joyous, beautiful and free . . . and I thought him a mean fellow. And then he told me how he dreaded bankruptcy, and how his uncle, who had been a clerk, had come to the workhouse . . . and what a disgrace that was. And I'm afraid he was a little drunk. And I wondered whether it would be possible to interest him in the question of Shelley's position as a prosodist . . . or whether even the beauties of Prometheus would comfort him at all. But when he asked me what I was going to Manchester for . . . do you know, I was ashamed to tell him?

There falls a little silence. Their voices hardly break it.

JESSICA. Yes . . . a terrible world . . . an ugly, stupid, wasteful world. A hateful world!

PHILIP. And yet we have to teach Mildred what love

of the world means, Jessica. Even if it's an uncomfortable business. Even if it means not adding her to that aristocracy of good feeling and good taste . . . the very latest of class distinctions. I tell you I haven't come by these doubts so easily. Beautiful sounds and sights and thoughts are all of the world's heritage I care about. Giving them up is like giving my carefully created soul out of my keeping before I die.

JESSICA. [*With a sudden fling of her hands.*] And into whose?

PHILIP. [*Shaking his head at the fire.*] I'm afraid into the keeping of everybody we are at present tempted to dislike and despise. For that's Public Life. That's Democracy. But that's the Future. [*He looks across at his wife half curiously.*] I know it's even harder for you women. You put off your armour for a man you love. But otherwise you've your Honour and Dignity and Purity . . .

JESSICA. Do you want a world without that, either?

PHILIP. I rather want to know just what the world gets by it. Those six thin girls at my uncle's . . . what do we get from them or they from the world? Little Miss Yates, now . . . her transgressions may be the most profitable thing about her . . .

JESSICA. Two wrongs don't make a right.

PHILIP. [*Quaintly.*] They often do . . . properly mixed. Of course you women could serve yourselves up to such lords of creation as my father quite profitably, in one sense, if you would.

JESSICA. [*Her lip curling.*] Thank you . . . we're not cattle.

PHILIP. No. Then there's a price to be paid for free womanhood, I think . . . and how many of you ladies are willing to pay it? Come out and be common women among us common men? [*He leans towards her, and his*

voice deepens.] Jessica, do you feel that it was you shot that poor devil six months ago? . . . that it's you who are to be hanged to-morrow?

JESSICA. I don't think I do.

PHILIP. That it's your body is being sold on some street this evening?

She gives a little most genuine shudder.

JESSICA. I hate to think about such things.

PHILIP. [*Summing up.*] Then there's precious little hope for the Kingdom of Heaven upon earth. I know it sounds mere nonsense, but I'm sure it's true. If we can't love the bad as well as the beautiful . . . if we won't share it all out now . . . fresh air and art . . . and dirt and sin . . . then we good and clever people are costing the world too much. Our brains cost too much if we don't give them freely. Your beauty costs too much if I only admire it because of the uglier women I see . . . even your virtue may cost too much, my dear. Rags pay for finery and ugliness for beauty, and sin pays for virtue. Why can nothing keep for long more beauty in a good man's eyes than the ugliest thing on earth? Why need no man be wiser than the biggest fool on earth? Why does it profit neither man nor woman to be more righteous than the greatest sinner on earth? [*He clenches his hands.*] These are the riddles this Sphinx of a world is asking me. Your artists and scholars and preachers don't answer them . . . so I must turn my back for a bit on artist and scholar and preacher . . . all three.

JESSICA *looks at him as he completes his apologia, sympathetic, if not understanding. Then she rallies him cheerfully.*

JESSICA. Meanwhile, my dear Phil, I shall not stop subscribing to the London Symphony Concerts . . . and I shall expect you to take me occasionally.

PHILIP. [*Jumping back from his philosophic world*]

Oh . . . that reminds me . . . I've a message for you from Tommy.

JESSICA. Have you? He was really irritating this morning.

PHILIP. We must take Tommy with a sense of humour. It wasn't so much a message as one of those little bursts of childlike confidence . . . he endears himself to one with them from time to time.

JESSICA. About me?

PHILIP. Yes. What it comes to is this. Will you please not flirt with him any more, because he hasn't the time, and he's too fond both of me and his wife to want to find himself seriously in love with you.

Now PHILIP *has not said this unguardedly, and* JESSICA *knows it. She'll walk into no little trap set for her vanity or the like. Still, it is with hardly a steady voice that she says simply . . .*

JESSICA. Thank you for the message.

PHILIP *goes cheerfully on; he is turning the pages of his book.*

PHILIP. He doesn't at all suppose you are in love with him . . . seriously or otherwise.

JESSICA. [*Steadily.*] Do you?

PHILIP. No.

JESSICA. [*Her tone sharpening still.*] And is this the first time you've discussed me with Tommy or anyone? Please let it be the last.

PHILIP. Are you angry, Jessica?

JESSICA. I'm more than angry.

PHILIP. I'm sorry.

Having kept her temper successfully, if not the sense of humour which PHILIP *warned her he was appealing to,* JESSICA *now allows herself a deliberate outburst of indignation.*

JESSICA. I despise men. I despised them when I was

fifteen . . . the first year I was conscious of them. I've been through many opinions since . . . and I come back to despising them.

PHILIP. He was afraid you wouldn't be pleased with him. But he has my sympathies, Jessica.

JESSICA. [*Throwing back her head.*] H a s he!

PHILIP. Tommy is what the entertaining State called this afternoon the Mean Sensual Man.

JESSICA. [*With utter contempt.*] Yes. When we're alone, having a jolly talk about things in general, he's all the time thinking I want him to kiss me.

PHILIP. While what you really want is to have him wanting to kiss you but never to kiss you.

JESSICA. [*In protest.*] No.

PHILIP. [*Fixing her with a finger.*] Oh, yes, Jessica.

JESSICA'S *sense of humour returns for a moment.*

JESSICA. Well . . . I can't help it if he does.

PHILIP. You can, of course. And the Mean Sensual Man calls it being made a fool of.

She puts a serious face on it again; not that she can keep one with PHILIP'S *twinkling at her.*

JESSICA. I give you my word I've never tried to flirt with Tommy . . . except once or twice when he has been boring me. And perhaps once or twice when I was in the dumps . . . and there he was . . . and I was boring him. I know him too well to flirt with him . . . you can't flirt with a man you know well. But he's been boring me lately, and I suppose I've been a bit bored. But suppose I have been flirting with him . . . I thought he was safe enough. [*That attempt failing, there is a tack left, and on this she really manages to work herself back to indignation.*] And a caddish thing to go speaking to you about it.

PHILIP. So he said . . . so he said.

JESSICA. Worse than caddish . . . outrageous! I never heard of such a thing . . . you shouldn't have let him.

PHILIP. Should I have knocked him down when he mentioned your name?

JESSICA. Yes . . . I wish you had.

PHILIP. Little savage!

JESSICA. I can't laugh about this. I'm hurt.

PHILIP. My dear, if you have any sense at all, you'll ask him to dinner and chaff him about it . . . before me.

JESSICA. Have you any understanding of what a woman feels when men treat her like this? Degraded and cheapened.

But the high moral tone PHILIP *will not stand. He drops chaff and tackles her.*

PHILIP. I can tell you what the man feels. He'll be either my father or me. That's your choice. Tommy's my father when you've put on your best gown to attract him, or he's me when he honestly says that he'd rather you wouldn't. Do you want him to be me or my father? That's the first question for you.

JESSICA. I want a man to treat a woman with courtesy and respect.

PHILIP. And what does that come to? My dear, don't you know that the Mean Sensual Man . . . no, not Tommy for the moment, but say Dick or Harry . . . looks on you all as choice morsels . . . with your prettinesses, your dressings up, your music and art as so much sauce to his appetite. Which only a mysterious thing called your virtue prevents him from indulging . . . almost by force, if it weren't for the police, Jessica. Do you like that?

JESSICA. I don't believe it.

PHILIP. Do you really believe that most men's good manners towards most pretty women are anything else but good manners?

JESSICA. I prefer good manners to yours. [*Then, both*

fine taste and sense of humour to the rescue again.] No . . . that's rude.

PHILIP. [*With much more affection than the words convey.*] I treat you as a man would treat another man . . . neither better nor worse. Is the compliment quite wasted?

JESSICA. [*As amazed at this unreasonable world.*] I want to be friends with men. I'd sooner be friends with them. It's they who flirt with me. Why?

PHILIP. [*Incurably mischievous.*] Of course I've forgotten what you look like, and I never notice what you have on . . . but I suspect it's because you're rather pretty and attractive.

JESSICA. Do you want women not to be?

PHILIP. No.

JESSICA. It's perfectly sickening. Of course, if I had dozens of children, and grew an old woman with the last one, I should be quite out of danger. But we can't all be like that . . . you don't want us to be.

PHILIP. [*Purely negative.*] No.

He leaves her free to justify herself.

JESSICA. I do my share of things. I make a home for you. I entertain your friends. It may cost your precious world too much . . . my civilisation . . . but you want all this done. [*Then with a certainly womanly reserve.*] And Phil . . . suppose I'm not much nicer by nature than some of you men? When I was a baby, if I'd not been fastidious I should have been a sad glutton. My culture . . . my civilisation . . . mayn't be quite up to keeping the brilliant Tommy a decent friend to me, but it has its uses.

But PHILIP *means to laugh this out of court, too.*

PHILIP. Look here, if it's only your culture keeps you from kissing Tommy . . . kiss him.

To be so driven from pillar to post really does exasperate her.

JESSICA. Phil . . . I sometimes think I'd sooner have been married to your father.

PHILIP. Why?

JESSICA. If you went on as he did instead of as you do . . . I should be sorry . . . I should despise you . . . but it would string me up and add to my self-respect enormously! [*Then a little appealingly.*] But it's when you're inhuman, Phil . . . that I'm ever so little tempted.

PHILIP. [*Contrite at once.*] I know I am. [*Then he gets up to stand looking into the fire, and what he says is heartfelt.*] But I do so hate that farm-yard world of sex . . . men and women always treating each other in this unfriendly way . . . that I'm afraid it hardens me a bit.

JESSICA. [*From her side, gently, with just a look at him.*] I hate it, too . . . but I happen to love you, Phil.

They smile at each other.

PHILIP. Yes, my dear. If you'd kindly come over here . . . I should like to kiss you.

JESSICA. I won't. You can come over to me.

PHILIP. Will you meet me half way?

They meet half way, and kiss as husband and wife can. They stand together, looking into the fire.

PHILIP. Do you know the sort of world I want to live in?

JESSICA. Should I like it?

PHILIP. Hasn't Humanity come of age at last?

JESSICA. Has it?

PHILIP. Mayn't we hope so? Finery sits so well on children. And they strut and make love absurdly . . . even their quarrelling is in all good faith and innocence. But I don't see why we men and women should not find all happiness . . . and beauty, too, . . . in soberer pur-

poses. And with each other . . . why not always some touch of the tranquil understanding which is yours and mine, dear, at the best of moments?

JESSICA. [*Happily.*] Do you mean when we sometimes suddenly want to shake hands?

PHILIP. [*Happily, too.*] That's it. And I want an art and a culture that shan't be just a veneer on savagery . . . but it must spring in good time from the happiness of a whole people.

JESSICA *gives herself one little shake of womanly commonsense.*

JESSICA. Well, what's to be done?

PHILIP. [*Nobody more practical than he.*] I've been making suggestions. We must learn to live on a thousand a year . . . put Mildred to a sensible school . . . and I must go on the County Council. That's how these great spiritual revolutions work out in practice, to begin with.

JESSICA. [*As one who demands a right.*] Where's my share of the job?

PHILIP. [*Conscious of some helplessness.*] How is a man to tell you? There's enough to choose from.

JESSICA. [*The burden of her sex's present fate upon her.*] Ah, you're normal. Nobody sizes you up as a good man or a bad man . . . pretty or plain. There's a trade for bad women and several professions for plain ones. But I've been taught how to be charming and to like dainty clothes. And I dare say I'm excitable and emotional . . . but I can't help it. I'm well off, married to you, I know. You do make me forget I'm a female occasionally.

PHILIP. Male and female created He them . . . and left us to do the rest. Men and women are a long time in the making . . . aren't they?

JESSICA. [*Enviously.*] Oh . . . you're all right.

PHILIP. [*With some humble knowledge of himself.*] Are we?

JESSICA. But I tell you, Phil, it isn't so easy for us. You don't always let us have the fairest of chances, do you?

PHILIP. No, I grant it's not easy. But it's got to be done.

JESSICA. Yes . . .

She doesn't finish, for really there is no end to the subject. But for a moment or two longer, happy together, they stand looking into the fire.